



# UNIVERSIDAD DE LA RIOJA

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El musical y su recepción en la prensa escrita: los casos de El fantasma de la ópera, El rey león y Rock of Ages.

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***El musical y su recepción en la prensa escrita: los casos de El fantasma de la ópera, El rey león y Rock of Ages., de ÁNGEL ACUÑA PAZ***

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# **Trabajo de Fin de Máster**

El musical y su recepción en la prensa escrita: los casos de *El fantasma de la ópera*, *El rey león* y *Rock of Ages*.

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Escuela de Máster y Doctorado



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## ABSTRACT

Partiendo del musical como espectáculo de entretenimiento de masas y en tanto que principal forma de teatro musical popular occidental del siglo XX, se analiza el impacto en la crítica de tres musicales en diferentes ciudades del mundo: Nueva York, Londres y Madrid. Los múltiples aspectos productivos de cada espectáculo son recibidos de manera distinta por cada público, en función de sus peculiaridades locales y culturales. En primer lugar se considerarán *El fantasma de la ópera* y *El rey león*, su repercusión económica a partir de los datos globales y sus producciones en diferentes países para, así, estudiar comparativamente la recepción crítica de los mismos. Como último caso, se estudiará el musical *Rock of Ages*, añadiendo las críticas de un país contrastante desde el punto de vista geográfico como es Australia.

**Palabras clave:** musical, teatro musical, critica, prensa

Starting with the musical as a mass entertainment show being the main form of Western popular musical theatre in the 20th Century, the impact on the review of three musicals in different cities of the world is considered: New York, London and Madrid. The multiple productive aspects of each show are received differently in the audience depending on the local and cultural particularities. As starting point, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Lion King* will be analysed, their economic impact from the global data, and their productions in different countries, in order to study comparatively their critical reception. Lastly, the musical *Rock of Ages* will be also studied, adding reviews from a contrasting country from a geographical point of view, as is the case of Australia.

**Keywords:** musical, musical theatre, review, press

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Este trabajo analiza el teatro musical moderno a través de la crítica periodística. Los estudios sobre crítica musical se han concentrado en el canon de la música occidental y apenas han tenido en cuenta este género a pesar de contar con más de un siglo de historia y con un impacto económico, geográfico y mediático mucho mayor que los demás géneros de música teatral, incluida la ópera.<sup>1</sup>

En musicología, es fácil y frecuente acceder a numerosas críticas de diferente índole: sobre óperas, conciertos, grabaciones, libros,... Todas ellas, por norma general, muy especializadas y realizadas por profesionales. Pero, ¿qué sucede en la crítica musical en lo referente a los musicales? Los musicales surgen a principios del siglo XX,<sup>2</sup> por lo tanto, cuentan con más de cien años de historia, tiempo más que suficiente para desarrollar un público y una presencia en la prensa escrita considerable. Las producciones de estos espectáculos han tenido presencia por todo el mundo, en mayor o menor medida y ello ha tenido repercusión en la sociedad y sus medios. Pero la realidad es que la especialización de la crítica sobre musicales o teatro musical es bastante reducida, varía entre países y depende de la cultura arraigada con este género musical.

Desde sus inicios, se han establecido dos núcleos importantes como centro de las producciones de musicales: Broadway (en Nueva York) y el West End (en Londres). Es en estas dos ciudades donde se concentran la mayoría de grandes producciones y estrenos, aunque con el paso de los años este fenómeno se ha globalizado y se extiende a lo largo de las grandes ciudades del mundo. Por norma general, los estrenos absolutos de las obras se realizan en estas dos ciudades y, más tarde, se llevan las producciones a otros centros importantes de teatro musical y países diferentes al de origen. Hoy en día el formato que se exporta a otro lugar, depende de las condiciones y contratos que establecen las productoras, si bien, cuando se lleva un musical a una capital con cierta tradición en este género, el espectáculo es idéntico al original.

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<sup>1</sup> Lars Helgert. "Criticism." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2256247> (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

<sup>2</sup> John Snelson and Andrew Lamb. "Musical." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19420> (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

La presencia de críticas en la prensa escrita es muy limitada y encontrar estudios académicos que versen sobre estos tópicos es prácticamente imposible, más difícil todavía si son en lengua castellana. La mayoría de trabajos sobre crítica y música de lengua inglesa no contemplan el musical dentro de sus estudios.<sup>3</sup> En España encontramos casos como *Los señores de la crítica* o *Palabra de crítico* que tampoco abordan el fenómeno del musical en ninguno de sus apartados, aunque en el primero es más comprensible por lo límites cronológicos que ocupa.<sup>4</sup>

Tan sólo en Nueva York y en Londres existe una sección en la prensa escrita dedicada a la crítica de estos espectáculos, si bien en el resto de ciudades se encuentran, asimismo, breves reseñas. Se podría llegar a afirmar que, en la actualidad, Broadway y el West End son los dos únicos centros de referencia a nivel mundial en cuanto a especialización en crítica musical sobre musicales. La prensa de otros países cuenta con críticas aisladas cuando se representa un musical importante o con gran repercusión, pero no existe una continuidad ni especialización en el género. Dentro de esas críticas encontramos textos que ofrecen datos informativos relevantes o curiosos del musical, pero no hacen un comentario crítico de la representación. Este tipo de juicios, en su mayoría, no siguen los parámetros o convenciones de la crítica musical general o la crítica formal musicológica.<sup>5</sup> Se tratan más bien de escritos que hablan sobre aspectos anecdóticos del musical, pero no de la representación en sí.

La metodología del presente trabajo se inspira en el artículo de Joan Acocella: “The Critical Reception of *Le Tricorne*”; el cual reconstruye la recepción de *El sombrero de tres picos* de Falla en tres países diferentes (Inglaterra, Francia y España) a través de la prensa escrita. Análogamente, para realizar este análisis, se han buscado y seleccionado críticas de “prensa de élite” de Nueva York, Londres y Madrid. Principalmente los siguientes: *New York Daily News*, *New York Magazine*, *The New York Times* y *Variety*, en Estados Unidos; *The Daily Telegraph*, *The*

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<sup>3</sup> Se encuentran tres trabajos relacionados con musicales y críticas: W.T. Stanley: *Broadway in the West End: an Index of Reviews of American Theatre in London, 1950–1975* (Westport, CT, 1978); S. Suskin: *Opening Night on Broadway: a Critical Quotebook of the Golden Era of the Musical Theatre, ‘Oklahoma!’ (1943) to ‘Fiddler on the Roof’ (1964)* (New York, 1990); S. Suskin: *More Opening Nights on Broadway: a Critical Quotebook of the Golden Era of the Musical Theatre, 1965 through 1981* (New York, 1997). Los dos últimos títulos se plantean desde un visión crítica del fenómeno, no analizando el impacto de las reseñas periodísticas.

<sup>4</sup> Teresa Cascudo y María Palacios (eds.): *Los señores de la crítica. Perdioidismo musical e ideología del modernismo en Madrid (1900 – 1950)* (Sevilla: Doble J, 2012); Teresa Cascudo y Germán Gan (eds.): *Palabra de crítico: Estudios sobre música, prensa e ideología* (Sevilla: Doble J, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Estos textos, en algunos casos, se asemejan más a críticas cinematográficas que a críticas musicales al uso.

*Guardian* y *The Independent*, en el Reino Unido; y *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País* y *La Razón*, en España.<sup>6</sup> En el anexo se incluyen treinta y seis críticas completas procedentes de estos once periódicos.

Otro aspecto interesante al buscar este tipo de críticas es el hecho de que las redes sociales, blogs y webs de ocio con la opción de publicar comentarios sobre los espectáculos, copan la mayor parte del contenido. El problema es que, al no tener filtro, no se accede a críticas especializadas, tan solo contamos con opiniones del público corriente. Aunque resulte nuevo, el público no especializado recurre a ellas como centro de información principal a la hora de obtener detalles de un espectáculo. Este tipo de formatos se irán consolidando con el tiempo, aunque no sustituyendo a los formatos tradicionales, ya que la información digital irá desplazando paulatinamente e incrementando su peso con el paso de los años. Los medios clásicos dejarán de tener el monopolio y expertos en el sector tienen la posibilidad de hacer oír su voz independientemente de estos medios, con igual valor informativo y calidad. Como este hecho es relevante hoy en día, a pesar de contar con críticas interesantes, es motivo suficiente para centrarnos exclusivamente en la prensa escrita.

Las producciones musicales realizadas desde principios del siglo XX tanto en Nueva York como en Londres son innumerables.<sup>7</sup> Se podrían incluir musicales importantes como *Cats*, *Chicago*, *Mamma Mia!*, o *Rent*, por citar algunos, pero este trabajo se centrará en tres producciones en concreto: *El fantasma de la ópera* (1986), *El rey león* (1994) y *Rock of Ages* (2005). Las razones de la elección de los dos primeros son las siguientes:

- Primero: la recaudación. *El rey león* y *El fantasma de la ópera* son, respectivamente, los musicales que mayores ingresos han generado en la historia del teatro musical.<sup>8</sup>
- Segundo: el gran número de producciones realizadas de los mismos en distintos países, llegando a los cinco continentes.

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<sup>6</sup> Sobre el concepto "prensa de élite" véase Denis McQuail: *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (Londres, SAGE, 2010), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Musical*, Wikipedia:

<https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical> (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

*Musical theatre*, Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical\\_theatre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_theatre) (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Gans: "The Lion King Is Now Top Earner in Box-Office History", *Playbill* (22 de septiembre de 2014):

<http://www.playbill.com/news/article/the-lion-king-is-now-top-earner-in-box-office-history-331145> (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)



- Tercero: *El rey león* y *El fantasma de la ópera* son dos de los musicales de mayor permanencia en cartelera tanto en Broadway como en el West End. Además ambos continúan representándose en Nueva York y en Londres actualmente.
- Cuarto: *El rey león* y *El fantasma de la ópera* son las producciones más exitosas en España tanto en afluencia de público como de ingresos y tiempo en taquilla. Ambos espectáculos han tenido una gran afluencia de público: a *El fantasma de la ópera* han asistido más de 730.000 personas y 2,5 millones para *El rey león*, todavía en cartel.<sup>9y10</sup>

Se ha descartado *Los miserables* por no seguir en cartel y no contar con un número de críticas mínimo en castellano relevante para el enfoque metodológico de partida. Las producciones más actuales no se realizaron en teatros estables sino que, más bien, han sido espectáculos en gira por España adaptándose a los teatros de la ciudades en las que se representaba.<sup>11</sup>

El interés por *Rock of Ages* surge, primero, por la relación directa que tiene el autor con este musical. Y, segundo, dado el conocimiento sobre el mismo, por las críticas y variedad de opiniones que surgen en los distintos lugares donde se ha realizado una producción. Es interesante analizar y conocer los contrastes de opiniones entre países sobre un musical idéntico que no goza de la misma aceptación a lo largo de los años.

Para entender uno de los grandes problemas de las críticas que vamos a estudiar en este trabajo hay que partir de las distintas formas de producción posibles para un musical. Estos aspectos productivos apenas son tenidos en cuenta por la crítica local. Es decir: la falta de especialización y experiencia en este campo desvirtúa en muchos casos la finalidad del texto. Lo que se constata en la gran mayoría de estas críticas es una falta de ideas y de conocimientos técnicos y artísticos de la obra, limitándose a hablar del aforo conseguido, sin tratar cuestiones concretas del espectáculos en sí. Broadway y el West End siguen siendo los focos neurálgicos

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<sup>9</sup> Publicado en *La Voz de Galicia* el 28 de junio de 2004.

<sup>10</sup> «*El rey león* arranca su sexta temporada en Madrid», *ABC* (24 de agosto de 2016): “Desde su estreno, el 24 de octubre de 2011, han visto el montaje madrileño más de 2,5 millones de personas en las más de 1.900 representaciones que se han llevado a cabo.”

<sup>11</sup> *La Voz de Galicia* (12 de febrero de 2014): “«Los Miserables» arranca hoy en Vigo con más de 9.000 entradas ya vendidas.”; *La Voz de Galicia* (19 de diciembre de 2014): “[Los Miserables] El musical más longevo y todo un clásico de los escenarios estará en A Coruña del 1 al 5 de enero.”

de los musicales a nivel mundial, pero no son el único lugar donde se hacen. En los últimos años, han surgido diferentes ciudades a lo largo del mundo que tratan de imitar el modelo neoyorquino o londinense, queriendo establecer núcleos emergentes de este género musical y teatral dentro de su oferta. Por supuesto, estas ciudades cuentan con espectáculos creados en el país de origen o con estrenos absolutos en el mismo país, pero lo cierto es que la mayoría de ellos son importados de los dos centros de referencia. Muchas de las funciones que se realizan en Nueva York o Londres venden todos o ciertos derechos de la producción a compañías que los quieran comprar para explotarlos en un determinado lugar, adaptando, en determinados casos, sus letras y diálogos al idioma del país que lo compra. En las grandes producciones, los directores y creadores del musical supervisan la nueva producción en otra ciudad, procurando que se mantenga completamente fiel al original, llegando a exigir las características técnicas y artísticas para la realización del mismo bajo riesgo de cancelación del evento. Es muy importante tener estas consideraciones en cuenta ya que, en ocasiones, nos encontramos con un musical que poco o nada tiene que ver con el original. Por lo tanto, las críticas que surjan en este caso no pueden ser comparables a las realizadas sobre el original.

El otro tipo de producción que se realiza desde hace unos años son los “tours” o giras.<sup>12</sup> Una productora compra todos o parte de los derechos del musical, si es necesario se adapta al idioma del país y, en lugar de establecerse en cartelera de un teatro durante unos meses, lleva el espectáculo a diferentes ciudades del país. Por lo tanto, durante meses la compañía se establece por unos días en una ciudad, adecúa la escenografía al teatro correspondiente y realiza varias sesiones durante esos días. El problema de este tipo de representaciones es que no cumplen al 100% las necesidades técnicas y artísticas de las producciones originales. Por ello, también se han descartado las reseñas referentes a este tipo de producciones.

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<sup>12</sup> *Musical theater*, New World Encyclopedia:  
[http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Musical\\_Theater](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Musical_Theater) (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

## 2. EL FANTASMA DE LA ÓPERA

Estrenado en el West End londinense el 9 de octubre de 1986, es el tercer musical que más tiempo lleva en los teatros de la ciudad británica.<sup>13</sup> Dos años más tarde, en 1988, se entrena en Broadway. *El Fantasma de la ópera* todavía se sigue representando en Nueva York, donde se ha convertido en la producción más longeva de la ciudad con más de 12.100 representaciones en la actualidad. Hasta que en 2014 *El rey león* le quitó el puesto, fue el evento de entretenimiento musical más exitoso y productivo económicamente de la historia con beneficios superiores a los 5.600 millones de dólares, cifras que seguirán creciendo ya que ambos mantienen representaciones en las dos ciudades.<sup>14</sup>

Entre sus logros cuenta con el premio Laurence Olivier en 1986 a “Mejor nuevo musical” y siete premios Tony en 1988 entre ellos el de “Mejor musical”. *El Fantasma de la ópera* ha sido visto por más de 130 millones de personas y llevado a 145 ciudades de 27 países diferentes. Cuenta con numerosas producciones entre las que se encuentran: Tokio (1988), Los Ángeles (1989), Melbourne (1990), Ciudad de México (1999), Madrid (2002), Buenos Aires (2009) o Moscú (2014), entre muchos otros lugares.

### a. Recepción en la prensa escrita

#### i. Londres

Londres se convirtió en el lugar del estreno absoluto de *El fantasma de la ópera*. Según los medios de comunicación, hubo mucha expectación ante tal evento y las críticas se hicieron eco al día siguiente.

*The Guardian* realizó una crítica por medio de Michael Billington el 11 de octubre de 1986: “The cheering thing about The Phantom Of The Opera is that it puts

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<sup>13</sup> “*The Phantom of the Opera (1986 musical)*”, Wikipedia:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Phantom\\_of\\_the\\_Opera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Phantom_of_the_Opera) (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

<sup>14</sup> Publicado el 10 de abril de 2012 en *The Guardian*:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/apr/10/lion-king-broadway-highest-grossing-show?newsfeed=true>

spectacle (and there is plenty of it) to the service of an exciting story and in that music is used, in a Pucciniesque way to intensify a dramatic situation.”

Otros extractos de críticas de medios ingleses son:

“It’s fantastic, fabulous and phantasmagorical! From the eerily flickering lights that greet you outside Her Majesty’s Theatre to the last, glorious curtain call, Andrew Lloyd Webber’s long-awaited new musical, Phantom of the Opera, is a triumph...”

(John Blake, *Daily Mirror*, 10 de octubre de 1986)

“Four words sum up the unstoppable success of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s triumphant re-working of this vintage spine-tingling melodrama. Stars, spectacle, score and story....”

(Jack Tinker, *Daily Mail*, 10 de octubre de 1986)

“Andrew Lloyd Webber’s new musical The Phantom of The Opera is a gorgeous operatic extravaganza that is a thrill to the blood and a sensual feast for the eye...”

(Richard Barkley, *Sunday Express*, 12 de octubre de 1986)

Todas las críticas realizan pequeños guiños en sus reseñas a la ópera, pero principalmente debido al título de la obra y no tanto a la relación de este género con la ópera. Es difícil encontrar autores que pongan en duda la calidad del musical, de su producción o su éxito. Otro aspecto llamativo es la importancia del compositor del musical, en este caso Andrew Lloyd Webber, sobre el resto de aspectos. No es que no se analicen el libreto, el vestuario o los actores/cantantes, sino que el principal foco de las críticas está en el creador de la banda sonora de la obra. La prensa inglesa mucho más benévola y complaciente que la americana (como veremos en las críticas de Nueva York), ensalzó el musical y sus críticos alabaron el espectáculo.

## **ii. Nueva York**

Es en Nueva York donde encontramos el mayor número de críticas realizadas en periódicos o revistas especializadas. Pese a haber sido estrenado en 1988, todavía hoy se continúa escribiendo esporádicamente sobre el musical y sobre sus hitos históricos y récords.

En el día de su estreno, el 26 de enero de 1988, la prensa neoyorquina se hizo eco del evento. Al día siguiente se podían leer críticas en periódicos como *New York Times*, *New York Daily* o *New York Post*.

Clive Varnes, de este último periódico, decía al día siguiente:

“Technically it is a piece of impeccably crafted musical theater, with theme, music and staging in perfect accord. They combine as a total statement that depends for its potency more on the sum of its parts than on the strength of any individual component.”

Un escueto párrafo en el que alaba la calidad del musical, pero sin dar detalles pormenorizados del mismo. Sin embargo, ese mismo día el crítico y columnista americano Frank Rich del *New York Times* le dedica una cuidada y extensa crítica en su columna. En su crítica, Rich hace gala de sus conocimientos del género (algo raro entre los críticos presentes la selección de este trabajo) y escribe en consecuencia. A diferencia de sus colegas ingleses, analiza minuciosamente cada uno de los detalles de la producción: escenografía, música, actores, influencias, libreto y actos. No duda en mencionar las carencias del espectáculo, pero tampoco en elogiar los aciertos. Estamos ante la crítica más dura, pero, a la vez, más profesional de las publicadas en los medios de la ciudad. Estas son algunas de sus palabras:

“It may be possible to have a terrible time at 'The Phantom of the Opera,' but you'll have to work at it. Only a terminal prig would let the avalanche of preopening publicity poison his enjoyment of this show, which usually wants nothing more than to shower the audience with fantasy and fun, and which often succeeds, at any price. It would be equally ludicrous, however and an invitation to severe disappointment to let the hype kindle the hope that 'Phantom' is a credible heir to the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals that haunt both Andrew Lloyd Webber's creative aspirations and the Majestic Theater as persistently as the evening's title character does. What one finds instead is a characteristic Lloyd Webber project long on pop professionalism and melody, impoverished of artistic personality and passion that the director Harold Prince, the designer Maria Bjornson and the mesmerizing actor Michael Crawford have elevated quite literally to the roof. 'The Phantom of the Opera' is as much a victory of dynamic stagecraft over musical kitsch as it is a triumph of merchandising uber alles.”

Howard Kissel, del *New York Daily*, no se detuvo demasiado en escribir al respecto. Su crítica fue breve pero clara y concisa:

“It is a spectacular entertainment, visually the most impressive of the British musicals. Perhaps the most oldfashioned thing about it is it's a love story, something Broadway has not seen for quite a while. To say the score is Lloyd Webber's best is not saying a great deal. His music always has a synthetic,

borrowed quality to it. As you listen you find yourself wondering where you've heard it before. In this case you've heard a lot of it in Puccini, in the work of other Broadway composers and even the Beatles. Nevertheless he seems to be borrowing from better sources, and he has much greater sophistication about putting it all together. There are some droll opera parodies, several beautiful songs, an impressive septet and a grand choral number, all richly orchestrated.”

En el lado opuesto tenemos a John Simon, crítico en el *New York Magazine*, que el 28 de enero cerraba su columna escribiendo “The only areas in which The Phantom of the Opera is deficient are book, music, and lyrics.” Es decir, la columna vertebral de un musical. ¿Qué lleva a un crítico a hablar tan tajantemente sobre un musical que al otro lado del Atlántico había sido un éxito generalizado? Obviamente, ninguna crítica es inocente e inintencionada.

También Walter Kerr, compañero de Rich en el *New York Times*, fue todavía más duro que su compañero. El 14 de febrero de 1988 decía que “El Fantasma de la Ópera no es más que la suma de sus efectos pictóricos. No es ópera, (...) no es humor. (...) Es psicológicamente liviano, sobrado de grotesco melodrama.”:

“The Phantom of the Opera can be no more than the sum of its pictorial effects. It's no opera (...), it's not humor. It's psychologically lightweight, long on melodramatic grotesquerie.”

Se puede ver que la crítica londinense fue muy entusiasta con el nuevo musical y esto contrasta con la crítica americana. Puede deberse a que se trata de un musical inglés, ya que el estilo americano y el inglés, tanto estético como musical y a nivel de producción difieren en algunos aspectos. Además, la cultura de ambas ciudades no es igual y esto puede verse reflejado en algunos de los comentarios de los críticos añadidos en el anexo.

### **iii. Madrid**

En España el espectáculo no llegó hasta el año 2002 a la ciudad de Madrid. Tan solo dos periódicos de tirada nacional se hicieron eco en sus páginas: *El País* y el *ABC*. *El País* solamente anunció el estreno de la obra, pero no se encuentra ninguna crítica en sus páginas el día posterior a su estreno. Sin embargo, *ABC* prestó atención

al estreno en Madrid unos días antes y, además, al día siguiente le dedicó nada menos que dos páginas en su sección de espectáculos.

La primera de las páginas de la sección “Espectáculos” del diario *ABC* del jueves 5 de septiembre de 2002 abre con una página entera dedicada a la crítica del estreno de *El fantasma de la ópera* en Madrid. El artículo se titula “Gran fantasía de turbulencias góticas” y está escrito por Juan Ignacio García Garzón. Junto a esta crítica también aparece una pequeña reseña escrita por Julio Bravo al final de la página titulada “Una obra de vuelo sinfónico”. Como sucedió en las críticas inglesas, la siguiente página es una entrevista firmada también por Julio Bravo al compositor del musical Andrew Lloyd Webber, quien acudió al estreno en la capital española.

La crítica de García Garzón es muy constructiva y completa. Consigue dar una pincelada general, considerando en detalle aspectos como la música, la historia, la actuación y el decorado. No tiene la complejidad, especialización, ni tampoco la extensión que tienen las críticas de sus colegas ingleses o americanos, pero cumple con los puntos de una crítica especializada.

“Podemos atestiguar que este *Fantasma de la Ópera* es una soberbia muestra de teatralidad con toda la nobleza que puede encerrar este término y, también, con todos los excesos.”

### 3. EL REY LEÓN

A diferencia de *El fantasma de la ópera*, *El rey león* surge de la película animada de Disney de 1994 cuya banda sonora se utiliza en el musical, lo que significa que el público conoce de antemano la música del espectáculo, una diferencia en comparación con los demás musicales aquí considerados. Se estrenó primero en Broadway y posteriormente en el West End: oficialmente tuvo su estreno absoluto el 13 de noviembre de 1997 en Nueva York y el 19 de octubre de 1999 se estrenó en Londres.<sup>15</sup> Es la tercera producción más duradera en cartel de Broadway y la de mayor recaudación de la historia, superando a *El fantasma de la ópera*. El espectáculo sigue en activo en varias ciudades y ha llegado a todos los continentes. Ha conseguido seis premios Tony, entre ellos a “Mejor musical” en los premios de 1998.<sup>16</sup>

#### a. Recepción en la prensa escrita

##### i. Nueva York

En casi diez años de diferencia con el estreno de *El fantasma de la ópera*, es patente la menor cantidad de críticas especializadas en los medios. Los periódicos de importancia de la ciudad continúan incluyendo estas reseñas en sus páginas: *New York Times*, *New York Mag* o *Variety*. También la revista *Weekly Entertainment* recoge este tipo de textos.

Puede que sea por el hecho de que la producción del musical fuera creada por una agencia americana o simplemente por el éxito de la película de Disney, pero las críticas en general son mucho más positivas que las que hemos leído sobre *El fantasma de la ópera*.

El primero de los ejemplos es la crítica “Cub Comes of Age: A Twice-Told Cosmic Tale” escrita por Ben Brantley el 14 de noviembre de 1997 en el *New York Times*:

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<sup>15</sup> “*The Lion King (musical)*”, Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Lion\\_King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lion_King) (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

<sup>16</sup> Cifras publicadas en detalle en Broadway World:

<http://www.broadwayworld.com/grosses/THE-LION-KING> (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)



“Where are you, really, anyway? The location is supposed to be a theater (...). Yet somehow you have fallen into what appears to be a primal paradise. And (...) disappears before the spectacle within it. Such is the transporting magic wrought by the opening 10 minutes of 'The Lion King.

There will inevitably be longueurs for both adults and children who attend this show. But it offers a refreshing and more sophisticated alternative to the standard panoply of special effects that dominate most tourist-oriented shows today. Seen purely as a visual tapestry, there is simply nothing else like it.”

Puede leerse en este extracto un ataque al resto de producciones realizadas en la época, donde lo que prima es el espectáculo dirigido a los turistas, dejando a un lado la calidad que se espera de un musical. Pero, ¿qué es lo que se debe esperar de un musical y en qué se basan los críticos para establecer los límites?

El 12 de noviembre de 1997, Greg Evans escribe su crítica en la revista *Variety* con el título “The Lion King” y en la que su subtítulo es muy contundente: “A new generation of cats just took over Broadway. Simply said, Julie Taymor’s staging of Disney’s *The Lion King* is a marvel, a theatrical achievement unrivaled in its beauty, brains and ingenuity.” Compara al nuevo musical de Disney con uno de los iconos de Broadway: *Cats*. Pero tanto entusiasmo se ve relativamente matizado en el final de su extensa crítica:

“Is “The Lion King” perfect? Of course not. A second act ballet, featuring dancers suspended in midair, is unintentionally campy, and, surprisingly, one of the film’s more popular songs, “Hakuna Matata,” seems a bit rushed.

Perhaps a few minutes could be trimmed here and there, but only a jackal would whine about such things. “The Lion King” is a show that will introduce a new generation of children to the theater, and doesn’t sacrifice a drop of intelligence, integrity or sophistication to do it.

A new generation of cats just took over Broadway. Simply said, Julie Taymor’s staging of Disney’s “The Lion King” is a marvel, a theatrical achievement unrivaled in its beauty, brains and ingenuity.”

Otra crítica en este sentido es la de Jess Cagle en la revista *Entertainment Weekly*. En su crítica publicada el 5 de diciembre de 1997, la autora le da la puntuación de A+ en su artículo, pero no le dedica más de tres párrafos antes de hablar de otros musicales en cartel:

“Yes, The Lion King's pacing drags a bit in the first act, and the show's venue, Disney's opulently refurbished New Amsterdam Theatre on 42nd Street, has a

few kinks (you'll miss a lot of the show if you're seated too far to the side). But Taymor's amazing vision overrides any quibbles. The Lion King can make you fall in love with theater no matter what theater it's in.”

No todas las críticas incluyen puntuación numérica, esto ocurre normalmente en semanarios o revistas. Este sistema es similar a la valoración usando estrellas utilizado en otros medios, con el fin de dar una evaluación visual al lector. Y, si analizamos con detenimiento, suelen ser críticas breves y concisas como la anterior.

Por último, tenemos que la crítica de John Simon del 15 de noviembre de 1997 en el *New York Magazine*. He aquí un extracto:

“Come to The Lion King with two pairs of eyes, one ear, and half a brain. You will be bombarded by some of the most beautiful and spectacular sights theater can offer from before and behind, so eyes in the back of the head will come in handy. You will be harangued by second-rate standard-show music and lyrics by Elton John and Tim Rice, and also by Lebo M's stirring African chants and ululations, to which your active ear should be cocked. Finally, you will be subjected to a well-worn, simplistic children's tale about a lion cub's hard road to adulthood and the throne of the animal kingdom, usurped by his wicked uncle in cahoots with some murderously laughing hyenas.”

Como se puede ver, a excepción de este último texto de Simon, la mayoría de las críticas de los medios más importantes alaban este nuevo estreno absoluto en la Gran Manzana. Incluso críticas posteriores, coincidiendo con aniversarios, cambio de teatro o récords alcanzados, no ponen en tela de juicio el musical y sigue gozando del favor de la crítica y el público. De ahí los datos y cifras que lleva cosechando todos estos años.

## **ii. Londres**

Al otro lado del Atlántico, dos años después, encontramos pocas críticas. Del mismo modo que sucedió con *El fantasma de la ópera*, que en Londres gozó de gran aceptación frente a la recepción más fría de Nueva York, aquí sucederá lo mismo pero de manera opuesta. La prensa inglesa alaba el trabajo de la producción, pero critica ciertos aspectos, lejos de las adulaciones americanas.

Después del estreno del musical en el Lyceum Theatre de Londres, Michael Billington le dedicó unos párrafos en su columna del periódico *The Guardian* el 21 de octubre de 1999, en la cual comienza diciendo:

“After all the hype, just how good is the Lion King which finally opened last night at the Lyceum Theatre in London? Impressive certainly. But its diverse visual brilliance is often betrayed by its Disneyfied verbal banality. To suggest, as one commentator recently did, that it is on a creative par with Hamlet is to show an insane lack of proportion.”

El musical no es malo, pero el lenguaje utilizado e importado de la película de Disney no termina de conformar una propuesta sólida para el crítico inglés. Sobre todo, en los intentos de magnificar el espectáculo poniéndolo a la altura de obras clásicas sajonas. Esto queda reflejado en el siguiente párrafo:

“Verbally, the show is totally American with its politically correct ecological references and its treatment of Timon the meerkat as a Catskills comic full of lines like: "Haven't you got your lions crossed?"”

Por último, elogia la labor y el trabajo de actores y cantantes, pero no deja de ser un espectáculo comercial para él. Cree que los niños disfrutarán del espectáculo, pero no está tan seguro en cuanto al público adulto. Ciertamente, dejando de lado sus opiniones personales sobre el musical, los datos y los hechos han terminado por contradecir a Billington:

“The show is a skilful commercial artefact; and there are impressive performances from Cornell John as a dignified Mufasa, Luke Youngblood as a fearless young Simba and Gregory Gudgeon as a chattering toucan even if Rob Edwards goes way over the top of Pride Rock as an epicene Scar. Children, I suspect, will love it. But to suggest that the Lion King advances the art of the musical or achieves a Shakespearean complexity is to surrender to preposterous fantasy.”

El 4 de enero de 2011, Billington vuelve a escribir en el periódico sobre el musical. Lejos de cambiar de opinión acerca de la obra, se reafirma en sus palabras y otorga el mérito de su continuidad en cartel a Julie Taymor y sus efectos visuales en la producción.

“I may not be the ideal person to explain the enduring appeal of The Lion King. When I saw it in 1999, I was struck by the thinness of its plot, the cursoriness of its characterisation and the blandness of the Elton John/Tim Rice musical numbers. But even I had to admit to the kaleidoscopic visual brilliance of Julie Taymor's production; and in that, I suspect, lies the ultimate source of the show's success. (...) What she did, with great skill, was to deploy an international theatrical language.”

Que el espectáculo sea visualmente impresionante, acompañado de su reclamo como película de Disney, enfocada a un público infantil es el éxito del musical a lo largo de los años:

“There are other objective reasons for the show's success. It appeals to children, it is based on a familiar Disney cartoon, it transcends language in a way that makes it easily recommendable (...). I'm less convinced by the argument that the story has some profound mythic resonance. (...) But I don't believe it's the archetypal narrative structure that is the secret of the show's success. In the end, the eyes have it.”

Analizando las palabras de Billington, puede entenderse lo siguiente: para el crítico inglés *El rey león* es un “espectáculo comercial”, pero *El fantasma de la ópera* es un musical; que contrasta con el gusto americano, donde triunfa lo comercial. Quizá en esto estriba la explicación de los diferentes planteamientos encontrados en Nueva York y Londres.

David Gritten publicó una reseña titulada “How The Lion King became the most successful stage show of all time” el diario *The Telegraph* el 17 de octubre de 2014, donde analiza los secretos del éxito del musical en la capital inglesa después de 15 años ininterrumpidos en cartel. No critica elementos del musical en sí, más bien es un artículo que trata de explicar qué aspectos han hecho que el musical goce de tal éxito. No critica como Billington, pero está de acuerdo con él en otorgarle la mayor parte del mérito a Julie Taymor y a la calidad de los actores:

“Credit for this goes to the prime mover of this stage version, director Julie Taymor. (...) But it works superbly. The performances in the London production are outstanding, starting with Brown Lindiwe Mkhize as the extraordinary shaman-mandrill, Rafiki, a glowering, wildly strange presence with a singing voice that can shake the Lyceum's foundations.”

### **iii. Madrid**

*El rey león* no llegó a España hasta el 2011. Probablemente debido al éxito e incremento de musicales representados en la Gran Vía madrileña desde el estreno de *El fantasma de la ópera*, la prensa española esta vez sí se hizo eco en la prensa escrita del musical, tanto antes como después del estreno. *La Razón*, *El País*, *ABC* y *El Mundo* le dedicaron unas líneas al nuevo espectáculo en la capital, si bien tan solo el *ABC* lo hizo cinco años más tarde.

España es un país sin una tradición en el teatro musical y eso es lo que se puede ver en las críticas realizadas al musical. Ya no solo el musical como espectáculo es cuestionado, sino los actores y cantantes también. Las críticas están de acuerdo en un punto en común: el desequilibrio que hay entre sus dos actos.

El diario *El Mundo* asistió al preestreno del musical y el 21 de octubre de 2011 escribió una crítica en la revista *Cinemanía* titulada “Lo mejor y lo peor de ‘El Rey León, el musical’”. Para su autor, David Bernal, el musical cumple con las expectativas creadas “Duda despejada: está a la altura. (...) la producción española es exactamente igual que la de Broadway o el West End.” Pero pronto aparece el problema señalado anteriormente: “La apertura (...) pone los pelos de punta (...). Su energía inunda el teatro Lope de Vega del espíritu de África. A partir de aquí todo va ligeramente cuesta abajo con una segunda parte más floja.”

En los diez puntos en los que divide su crítica, también hace consideraciones positivas sobre la labor de la directora (como hicieron sus colegas británicos) y comenta ciertos aspectos del elenco de actores del musical:

“8. Los acentos cantan un poco. En el montaje se dan cita hasta trece nacionalidades. Simba está interpretado por el triunfante mexicano Carlos Rivera; Mufasa es panameño y Nala brasileña. La actriz que interpreta a Rafiki, por ejemplo, no habla español y se sabe el texto fonéticamente. Esto da lugar a una ensalada de acentos que no molesta demasiado y, aunque se irá homogenizando en sucesivas representaciones, enriquecen el rollo multicultural cultural del asunto.

9. Los cachorros lo hacen bien. En España no hay tradición de musicales y, por tanto, tampoco de enseñanzas artísticas en las escuelas, por eso es muy difícil encontrar a niños que sepan actuar, cantar y bailar bien en las producciones que lo requieren. Conscientes de esto, la productora Stage Entertainment hace dos años puso en marcha una escuela de El Rey León en la que formaron a sesenta niños de los que finalmente seleccionaron a diez que se irán turnando para interpretar a Simba y Nala de cachorros. Los que nosotros vimos –David García y Yamileth Cayetano– lo hicieron de maravilla.”

No tener tradición de musicales, condiciona cualquier tipo de crítica. Primero, porque todas las referencias que se tienen son de otro país y ello repercute en la forma de entender este tipo de espectáculo. Y segundo, porque al no haber enseñanzas de este tipo en el sistema educativo, el público no está familiarizado con los musicales, ni se tiene talento autóctono que pueda defender esta tipo de obras al mismo nivel que otros países que sí lo tienen. Por extensión, esto también afecta a la percepción del crítico,

que tiende a buscar referencias o modelos en otros espectáculos, como pueden ser la ópera, el cine o el teatro.

Miguel Ayanz, dedica tres párrafos en su columna de *La Razón* el 28 de octubre de 2011 con el título “«El Rey León»: Rey pero no emperador”. Vuelve a surgir el problema de calidad entre actos:

“Precedido de enormes expectativas, por fin rugió en Madrid «El Rey León». Justificadas, en parte: es difícil no emocionarse ante la grandiosa teatralidad impregnada de esencia africana del arranque de este musical: los quince minutos de «El ciclo vital» resumen la aventura iniciática del protagonista y merecen por sí solos estar en la historia del teatro. (...) Lo malo de las expectativas, y de un arranque así de contundente, es que es difícil mantener el listón al mismo nivel durante todo el montaje. “

Se encuentran igualmente valoraciones positivas sobre el trabajo de la directora: “Es un despliegue de «delicatessen» escénicas fruto de sus años en Asia”. Y, de nuevo, críticas a los actores:

“El reparto hace, en general, un trabajo digno, aunque no redondo. Cantan bien y tienen todos gran presencia. Pero, para una apuesta tan fuerte, ¿no fue posible reunir un grupo más español? Se hacen extraños los acentos del mexicano Carlos Rivera (Simba adulto) y del panameño David Comrie (Mufasa), algo afectados ambos. Igual que Sergi Albert, éste sí español, cuyo Scar resulta barroco, incluso amanerado. La parte femenina sale vencedora: la leona Nala de Daniela Pobega tiene gran fuerza, y el mandril Rafiki de Brenda «Brinzo» Mholongo, aunque de forzado acento, es pura magia. Zazu, Pumbaa y un andalucísimo Timón hacen las delicias del respetable en el apartado cómico gracias al buen hacer de Esteban Oliver, Albert Gracia y David Ávila. Y, por momentos, la alegría y el colorido del cuerpo de actores y bailarines hacen del teatro una fiesta. «El Rey León» será, casi seguro, el rey de la cartelera. Pero no el emperador.”

El 5 de noviembre de 2011 encontramos la crítica “El Rey León tiene un problema (o dos)” de Marcos Ordóñez en el periódico *El País*. Por tercera vez, volvemos a encontrarnos con los mismos puntos fuertes y débiles anteriormente citados:

“El Rey León se anuncia como "el musical que conmueve al mundo". A mí me ha deslumbrado (a ratos), me ha divertido (a ratos), me han gustado las melodías más africanas de su partitura, me ha provocado rendida admiración el enorme empeño del equipo (ese entregadísimo elenco multinacional de intérpretes sudafricanos y latinos que no sólo cantan y bailan sino que realizan un gran trabajo gestual y físico, con máscaras y marionetas bunraku), pero conmoverme, lo que se dice conmoverme, no me ha conmovido.”

Una vez más el trabajo de Taymor queda encumbrado y su apuesta fuerte por la obertura de la obra sigue sin dejar indiferente a nadie:

“El arranque, tan fastuoso como apabullante, muestra bien a las claras la estrategia de Julie Taymor, demiurga del asunto (...). Imposible contabilizar, delimitar, absorber ese ejército de gacelas, jirafas, cebras y garzas de caña y madera, de tela y papel, que desbordan el escenario del Lope de Vega.”

Aunque, en opinión de Ordóñez, los actores durante el primer acto han estado bien y no remarca nada negativo en este aspecto. Pero sí coincide en carencias tras el parón entre actos:

“El Rey León tiene un problema gordo y ese problema sobreviene tras el intermedio. Han sido tantos los prodigios (casi se me olvidaban, por cierto, los preciosos juegos de sombras, a la manera del teatro balinés) que durante la segunda parte tienes la sensación de que ya lo has visto todo: derroche (o desequilibrio) se llama esa figura.”

Sin embargo, en general, pero para el segundo acto concretamente, recalca los siguiente:

“Hay otro problema dentro del problema, y por partida doble: Carlos Rivera y Daniela Pobega (Simba y Nala adultos), para cuyo casting parecen haber antepuesto las dotes vocales (que son muchas) a la llamémosle flexibilidad actuarial. Lo diré de otra forma: no brotan precisamente chispas entre los dos (llámenle feeling, llámenle química, llámenle como quieran) porque Carlos Rivera parece la respuesta mexicana a Victor Mature, y porque alguien no le ha dicho a la brasileña Daniela Pobega que el castellano fonético enfría cualquier papel en ese idioma, por muy felinos que sean sus movimientos, que lo son y desde aquí se celebran. Así las cosas, la parte del león de la segunda parte (como diría Groucho) se la llevan tan guapamente los cómicos (Gracia & Ávila), cosa que también se celebra pero que requeriría un ajuste fino: algo pasa, pongamos por caso, en Mucho ruido para nada cuando apenas recordamos a Beatrice y Benedict y volvemos a casa celebrando las gracias de Dogberry y sus fools por muy bien que lo hayan hecho.”

A diferencia de lo que vimos en *El fantasma de la ópera*, en ninguna de ellas se habla sobre la música o los compositores con detenimiento. También es cierto, que esta obra no está compuesta por un solo compositor, pero es destacable la importancia que se otorgó a A. L. Webber en Londres, Nueva York y Madrid, frente a la despreocupación en las críticas de *El rey león*.



#### 4. ROCK OF AGES

Al contrario que los musicales anteriores, *Rock of Ages* se estrenó en Los Ángeles en 2005 y luego en Las Vegas (2006). Posteriormente el espectáculo se mudó a Nueva York a los teatros de Off-Broadway a finales de 2008. Unos meses después, el musical se transfirió a Broadway, donde se estrenó oficialmente el 7 de abril de 2009 en el teatro Brooks Atkinson. La última representación tuvo lugar el 18 de enero de 2015 convirtiéndolo en el musical número 28 de mayor duración en Broadway.<sup>17</sup>

En 2011, la producción se estrenó en Londres el 27 de septiembre en el Garrick Theatre. Se mantuvo en la cartelera del West End durante dos años, cerrando el 2 de noviembre de 2013. Entre otras producciones internacionales están las de Toronto (2010), Corea del Sur (2010), Australia (2011) o Manila (2012). Más recientemente se han llevado a cabo adaptaciones del musical en México, Panamá o Malta.

*Rock of Ages* también ha tenido una película basada en el musical. Los derechos fueron vendidos a Warner Bros. y New Line Cinema. Se estrenó el 15 de junio de 2012 en cines y cuenta con estrellas de Hollywood como Tom Cruise, Alec Baldwin o Catherine Zeta-Jones y la cantante Mary J. Blige.

##### a. Recepción en la prensa escrita

###### i. Nueva York

Previamente a su estreno en Nueva York, alguna críticas fueron muy duras durante su etapa en Los Ángeles, pero eso no impidió que el musical se trasladara primero a Las Vegas y posteriormente a Nueva York:

“Reviews were occasionally brutal — Backstage called it “possibly the worst theatrical production in the last several years” — but receipts were promising enough that in May 2006 its producers transferred it to Las Vegas for a weeklong run at the Flamingo. (...) As usual, reviews varied. But the 499-seat theater was often sold out.” (Dave Itzkoff, *New York Times*, 2 de abril de 2009)

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<sup>17</sup> “*Rock of Ages (musical)*”, Wikipedia:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock\\_of\\_Ages\\_\(musical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_of_Ages_(musical)) (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)



En Nueva York, las críticas fueron algo distintas. La siguiente crítica fue publicada 7 de abril de 2009 en el *New York Times*, después del estreno oficial, y firmada por Charles Isherwood. El título de su crítica es “Big-Hair Rockers Return in a New Arena: Broadway!”:

“The champ is unquestionably “Rock of Ages,” a seriously silly, absurdly enjoyable arena-rock musical (...). The frothing piles of pleated, teased, bleached, dyed and fried tresses being tossed around in this new show about the good old days — in this case the 1980s on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles — make “Hair” look tame indeed, virtually Rogaineready, the Yul Brynner of musicals.

Fortunately, and I must say surprisingly, the attractions of this latest in the ceaseless parade of jukebox musicals on Broadway extend well beyond the extensions.

Dressing up these story lines like studs on a belt are more than two dozen radio-rock hits from the era. Audiences to whom this music is utterly foreign will no doubt view “Rock of Ages” as they might an unusually raucous couple of hours in the monkey cage at the zoo. You don’t have to truly like the music to succumb to the tug of remembrance it inspires, but you have to recognize it. If Proust had never tasted that first madeleine, the last wouldn’t have had quite the same impact.

“Rock of Ages” made me realize with humility how time can play appalling tricks on taste; songs that used to make my skin crawl and my lip curl, having now acquired the patina of age, brought forth a stream of affectionate recollection. “Don’t Stop Believing” and “Waiting for a Girl Like You” and “We Built This City” are not the musical equivalents of classic Bordeaux vintages, but I never would have guessed that wine coolers could age this well.

“Rock of Ages” does not aspire to be a Broadway musical for the ages, but for anyone whose youth coincided with the time period in question, the siren call of those screaming guitars and singalong choruses may be impossible to resist.”

Parece que Isherwood manifiesta puntos de vista contradictorios, pero hay dos cosas claras. En primer lugar, el musical es poco más que una sucesión de canciones famosas de los 80. En segundo lugar, sugiere que el musical no durará demasiado tiempo en cartel.

David Rooney escribió también sobre el estreno de *Rock of Ages* el 7 de abril de 2009 en *Variety*.

“If the 1980s were a bad-fashion blur you'd rather forget, "Rock of Ages" may not be for you. But if tortured mullets, unwaxed chests, studded leather, acid-wash denim and wailing guitars make you yearn for the Reagan years, this

unapologetically silly hair-metal jukebox musical will probably have you gulping tequila shots and singing along.”

Admite que la música de este espectáculo no es lo que se suele encontrar en los teatros de Broadway, pero esta fórmula ha funcionado y atrae público al teatro:

“That music may not feature heavily in the iTunes libraries of Broadway show fans, but given the eternal push to find new theater audiences, maybe it’s not a bad idea to bypass the regulars once in a while and speak directly to the bridge and tunnel crowd.

As the show opens with blinding lights, ear-shredding guitars and hammer-handed drumming, it’s clear that mosh-pit atmosphere is paramount. (...) But behind the show’s trashy facade lies a conventionally sweet musical that traces the standard trajectory of boy meets, loses and finally wins girl. (...) When an audience is primed to laugh just by the opening bars of a cheesy ’80s anthem, the writing doesn’t exactly need to be timeless, nor the comedy particularly clever.

While “The Wedding Singer” failed to sustain a Broadway audience with its ’80s campfest, that show didn’t have around 30 of the decade’s quintessential hits sampled by a cast that screeches, roars and purrs as if to the power chord born. It’s safe to say nostalgists won’t feel cheated by “Rock of Ages,” and that it won’t be stealing audiences from “South Pacific.” But by the time the ensemble unites on Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believin’,” even nonbelievers may start inhaling the Aqua Net and embracing their inner rocker.”

La crítica “Girls, girls, girls” de Stephanie Zacharek publicada el 8 de abril de 2009 en el *New York Magazine* es escueta y poco detallada. Casi podría quedarse con el subtítulo de su crítica “Rock of Ages is in on its own joke, which ruins all the fun” ya que poco más añade en su texto:

“Rock of Ages is a mangled singing, dancing extravaganza set to the hair metal of Whitesnake, Journey, and Bon Jovi, among others. (Def Leppard, proving their members are gentlemen of taste, wouldn't grant the rights to their music).”

Vuelve a matizar la idea de éxitos de rock de la época, para matizar lo siguiente:

“Is too full of self-conscious winks, nudges, and wine-cooler jokes to be much fun. There's energy onstage, all right, but it's unfocused and muddled. The dancers (...) wriggle about in epaulette-shouldered leather jackets and neon animal-print Spandex, trying to conjure the big-haired ghosts of a lost era. They only end up looking cheap and desperate. This is no way to get your rocks off.”

A pesar de la diversidad de opiniones y críticas sobre el musical, en general tiene una buena aceptación. El teatro está lleno todas las semanas y el público americano, que en su adolescencia creció escuchando esas canciones, queda fascinado con el espectáculo. Independientemente de la historia o de si es un musical o no apropiado para Broadway.<sup>18</sup>

## ii. Londres

En Londres, el musical dura dos años en cartel, pero las críticas aquí son bastante distintas a las que hemos leído, por ejemplo, en Nueva York. *The Guardian* y *The Telegraph* puntúan, además, sus críticas y ambos periódicos le otorgan una estrella sobre cinco.

El 28 de septiembre de 2011, Charles Spencer realiza la crítica más dura de todas las que hemos leído en su texto de *The Telegraph*: “This is as unpleasant a pile of theatrical poo as it has ever been my misfortune to tread in.” Así empieza su texto y bastante claras son sus sensaciones al respecto:

“Yet another in the apparently endless parade of mindless jukebox musicals. (...) all seem to blur into one with their high-tech productions and soulless emoting.”

En esto está de acuerdo con la percepción de sus colegas americanos, la idea de gramola de canciones, pero en este caso “sin sentido”. Continúa:

“The big surprise is that this dire show (...) has received a warm welcome in some quarters. It has been running for a couple of years on Broadway, where it was described as a guilty pleasure by the New York Times, touring versions are rolling out across the world, and a film version is threatened for next year starring Tom Cruise, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Russell Brand.”

Recuerda la buena acogida y las buenas críticas recibidas en Nueva York y pone de relieve los años que lleva en cartel, el formato de producción de giras alrededor del mundo y la película que “amenaza” estrenarse. También le dedica unas líneas a su guionista:

“The show’s book by Chris D’Arienzo is inanely predictable, lamentably written and surprisingly sordid. (...) There is also a horribly louche narrator (...) who constantly sticks his tongue out at the audience in a lewd manner as he celebrates sex and drugs and rock’n’roll.”

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<sup>18</sup> Broadway Grosses - *Rock of Ages*:  
<http://www.broadwayworld.com/grosses/ROCK-OF-AGES> (última consulta: Mayo de 2017)

Deja claro que no hay absolutamente nada en el musical que sea de su agrado o que esté mínimamente trabajado: ni la historia, ni las bromas, ni los actores.

“The jokes are unfunny, the story both predictable and appallingly written, while the acting (...) is dismal. I usually have a soft spot for cheesy sleaze, but there is something repellent about this show’s leering manner.”

Para finalizar, compara el musical americano con el británico *We will rock you*, un musical británico tributo al grupo Queen anterior a *Rock of Ages*:

“I suppose the undistinguished rock numbers are ground out efficiently enough, but otherwise the show strikes me as having no redeeming merits whatever. I fondly thought jukebox musicals had reached their nadir with Ben Elton’s dire script for the Queen tribute show *We Will Rock You*. Believe me, *Rock of Ages* is even worse.”

Michael Hann también escribe el mismo 28 de septiembre de 2011 en *The Guardian*. También es muy duro con el musical:

“It’s a very peculiar show indeed, with an unvarying and unpleasant tone of careless sexualisation. (...) Aside from the female lead, Sherrie (Amy Pemberton), women exist only to parade in underwear, as hookers, strippers or waitresses, and Sherrie has to take on two of those jobs.

Tampoco hace gracia cierto tipo de humor que para el público americano es hilarante:

“The furthest it strays from stereotype is to reveal the developer’s camp son Fritz as straight – “I’m not gay! I’m German!” – and to use REO Speedwagon’s *I Can’t Fight This Feeling* to celebrate two men discovering their love for each other, though it is a shame that scene is played for comedy rather than tenderness.”

The book, by Chris D’Arienzo, is as shallow as the scene it supposedly sends up. Worse, it is almost entirely free of laughs, reliant on frequent recourse to the use of props such as prosthetic penises, and Lonny, the narrator (Simon Lipkin) wearing a T-shirt bearing the legend “Hooray for boobies”. When he bemoans being “lured to narrate a show with poop jokes and Whitesnake songs”, one feels like commiserating.

Coincide con Spencer en su crítica a este tipo de musicales, a los que se refiere como una “gramola”. Pero a diferencia de otros musicales basados en el mismo estilo, como *Mamma Mia!* o *We will rock you*, donde las canciones son más familiares para el público inglés que las del musical americano, estas no generan el mismo entusiasmo, ya que no fueron éxitos en el Reino Unido o Europa:

“That wouldn't matter if the songs were up to snuff, but these jukebox musicals stand or fall on the audience's love for the music, hence the continuing success of *We Will Rock You* and *Mamma Mia!* In Britain, *Rock of Ages* might struggle with its score. The back catalogues of Styx, Quarterflash, Night Ranger and Pat Benatar – all mined here – don't resonate in the UK the way they might in Peoria. It climaxes, inevitably, with *Don't Stop Believin'* and one thinks: Stop? I never started.”

"As a feelgood, singalong, rock'n'roll musical it's hard to fault" escribía Pierre Perrone, también el 28 de septiembre de 2011 para *The Independent*. Pero no es tan duro como sus compañeros:

“More a mixtape than a juke-box musical, it manages to both glory in and lampoon the clichés of the rock genres it's built on, with knowing nods to Axl Rose and David Lee Roth, and the odd X-rated joke about groupies and ping-pong balls, and wipes the floor with the Queen vehicle. (...)The most fun I've had at a musical since *Jersey Boys*.”

### iii. Australia

Ningún medio de comunicación escrito se hizo eco del estreno de *Rock of Ages* en Australia: ni en Brisbane ni en Melbourne. Sí lo hicieron blogs o webs de musicales. Por el contrario, sí se publicaron críticas a propósito del cierre del espectáculo.

*The Guardian* publica, en su edición australiana del 27 de octubre de 2011, lo siguiente:

“Sydney pulls the plug on *Rock of Ages*. Jukebox musical's premiere in the Australian city is postponed indefinitely due to the 'current economic environment”

Matt Trueman, autor de la crítica, recuerda el éxito del musical en Broadway, con sus cinco nominaciones a los premios Tony y las malas críticas recibidas en Reino Unido:

“Despite Broadway success, including five nominations at the Tony awards, the UK premiere of *Rock of Ages* was much derided by theatre critics, with the Telegraph's Charles Spencer calling it "as unpleasant a pile of theatrical poo as it has ever been my misfortune to tread in".”

Trueman solamente se limita a parafrasear al crítico inglés Charles Spencer y su visual forma de resumir el musical en cuestión.

*The Courier Mail* publica el 24 de noviembre de 2011 también una crítica al cierre temprano del musical: “Curtain falls early on Rock of Ages musical”. Pero pese a que tuvo buena aceptación y buena afluencia de público, el musical no terminó de funcionar debido a los precios de las entradas y el teatro en el que se representaba:

“Despite rave reviews and audience acclaim the '80s rock musical Rock of Ages is closing its doors early (...). With the most expensive tickets coming in at a hefty \$130, the show was up against Disney juggernaut Mary Poppins which starts previews at the end of December. The show sold well in Melbourne but was in a much smaller theatre and struggled to find its audience in larger venues like QPAC. (...) Rock of Ages was roundly applauded by critics after the November 13 opening but it hasn't been enough to encourage audiences to see the show.”

#### iv. Madrid

El musical *Rock of Ages* no se ha estrenado en España como hizo en Londres, por tanto no hay críticas sobre el mismo. Sí hay críticas a la película en diarios como *El País*.<sup>19</sup>

“Rock of Ages, adaptación cinematográfica del musical nacido precisamente en Los Ángeles, y representado, entre otros, en los teatros del neoyorquino Broadway y el West End londinense, es un producto genuinamente contemporáneo: indolente, insustancial, blanco, que va de gamberro pero que sólo es ligeramente travieso, quizá como los tiempos que corren.”

Pero como los derechos fueron vendidos a Warner para realizar la película, el 17 de marzo de 2017, el Parque Warner de Madrid estrenó la primera adaptación del musical en su parque temático de la comunidad.<sup>20</sup> Con una duración de 30 minutos, tenemos un ejemplo de sucedáneo de un musical. No hay críticas sobre este espectáculo, pero sí anuncios en medios.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Publicado el 9 de agosto de 2012 por Javier Ocaña:

[http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/08/09/actualidad/1344534495\\_774829.html](http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/08/09/actualidad/1344534495_774829.html)

<sup>20</sup> Publicado en Broadway World el 10 de abril de 2017:

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<sup>21</sup> Publicado en “Telemadrid.es” el 15 de abril de 2017:

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También en la página web del parque temático:

<http://parquewarner.com/espectaculos/show/rock-of-ages-el-musical>

## 5. CONCLUSIONES

Como se puede observar, la crítica profesional sobre musicales es muy variada y escasa comparada con la que podemos encontrar en relación con la ópera, el teatro o el cine. Los dos epicentros del teatro musical moderno (Broadway y West End) cuentan con críticos especializados con espacio en las páginas de los periódicos más importantes. En los ejemplos considerados, los medios de comunicación se hacen eco de los estrenos de nuevos musicales y dedican una crítica individual al día siguiente. Estas críticas las escriben profesionales del sector acostumbrados a ver, valorar y escribir sobre este género musical. Sus conocimientos técnicos y artísticos sobre la materia son excelentes y su forma de escribir es fluida a la vez que cercana.

En otros países la crítica de musicales no es tan especializada. Pocos medios dedican líneas a la valoración de este tipo de eventos. Sí lo hacen, en cambio, ante la inminente llegada de un musical a la ciudad, pero sin ofrecer más que datos técnicos y, en ocasiones, sobre el elenco artístico del mismo y la historia del musical. Es difícil ver publicada alguna información sobre el espectáculo una vez estrenado. Los críticos no son tan técnicos ni especializados como los americanos o los ingleses, se podría afirmar que son críticos musicales más generalistas o no acostumbrados a este género. En otros casos podría tratarse de críticos especializados en otro género (cine, teatro...) o simplemente periodistas sin especialización musical.

Se pueden hacer varias consideraciones. En primer lugar, hay dos ciudades claramente relevantes en la publicación de críticas sobre musicales a nivel mundial: Londres y Nueva York. Que, a su vez, son los dos centros de producción históricamente más importantes. En segundo lugar, las críticas pueden llegar a ser opuestas sobre un mismo musical a ambos lados del Atlántico. En ocasiones puede ser debido a diferencias culturales. En otros casos, por diferencias en la tradición musical. Muchas críticas del mismo país llegan a las mismas conclusiones, aunque con estilos literarios diferentes. Lo que sí es seguro es la escasa relevancia y especialización de los críticos de los medios escritos. También, a diferencia de lo que sucede en las críticas de ópera, es llamativo que la mayoría de estas críticas analizadas no se centran en la actuación de los actores/cantantes. Valoran muchos otros aspectos antes que juzgar a los personajes y, si lo hacen, se examina a los protagonistas principales.

Las críticas españolas cuentan con el referente de los estrenos, algo que no es posible en el caso de los estrenos absolutos, lo que ya condiciona notablemente la

perspectiva del crítico. Como señalaba David Bernal, en España no hay tradición de musicales y, por tanto, tampoco de enseñanzas artísticas en las escuelas. Ello condiciona culturalmente tanto al crítico como al público. Al crítico, no porque no sea especialista en teatro musical o carezca de conocimientos suficientes sobre la materia, sino porque el espectáculo que va a valorar no tendrá la calidad técnica que tiene el original. Y el público porque no tiene un referente sobre el que atenerse, por tanto podrá encontrar parecidos en el teatro hablado, el cine o la ópera.

Algunos de los críticos están pensando como un crítico de cine o de teatro hablado. ¿Hasta qué punto las críticas de musicales se parecen a las de cine más que a las de música clásica? Depende de la preparación o la familiarización del crítico con el género, este abordará de forma más o menos cercana su valoración o, por el contrario, tratará de buscar similitudes en otros.

Para finalizar, resulta interesante observar y analizar cómo la recepción de un musical a nivel de público y crítica varía en función del lugar donde se represente. Igualmente llamativo es contrastar un musical que gana o está nominado a los premios más importantes del sector, sea un fracaso o reciba críticas tan negativas y duras en otro lugar, como hemos visto en los casos anteriores. Si hablamos de producciones del mismo musical en diferentes idiomas podría atribuirse, en algún caso, a problemas de adaptación de guión y letras, como sucede con *El rey león* o *Rock of Ages* con su pequeña producción en Madrid pero en situaciones donde el musical es exactamente igual al original, puede ser debido probablemente a diferencias culturales.



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## **I. Críticas: *El fantasma de la ópera***

### **1. "The Phantom of the Opera"**

Michael Billington for The Guardian

*October 11, 1986*

We have had some pretty grim experiences in musical theatre in recent years. We have seen people turned into rollerskating ciphers, dwarfed by laserbeams and sententious holograms and treated as pawns in political chessgames. But the cheering thing about The Phantom Of The Opera is that it puts spectacle (and there is plenty of it) to the service of an exciting story and in that music is used, in a Pucciniesque way to intensify a dramatic situation.

Andrew Lloyd Webber and Richard Stilgoe, responsible for the book, have had the shrewd idea of going back to Gaston Leroux's original 1911 novel. So we get a story that mixes horror and romance in equal proportions: horror in that it is about the terrorisation of the Paris Opera House by an elusive phantom who causes multiple deaths when his demands are not met, romance in that it is a Beauty and the Beast myth about a disfigured hero who can only express his love for a soprano by becoming her musical inspiration.

It may be hokum but it is hokum here treated with hand on heart rather than tongue in cheek. And even if one misses some of Leroux's grislier details, such as the final incarceration of the soprano's rescue in a hexagonal, waterfilled torturechamber, the palpable sincerity means that there is never any danger of The Phantom Of The Opera becoming like the Marx Brother's Night At The Opera.

We are made to care about the people (though Raoul, the romantic rescuer, seems a bit wimpy compared to the figure of purblind obstinacy Leroux created). But much of the success of the evening lies in Lloyd Webber's ability to move from operatic pastiche to music full of plangent yearning.

Resisting the temptation to use lashings of Gounod, he gives us a mixture of MetroGoldwyn Meyerbeer, cod-Mozart and, in the Phantom's own Don Juan opera, something that is 1860s avantgarde. Lloyd Webber's own prevailing style, however, is lush, romantic, stringfilled and, if occasionally one achingly passionate number threatens to merge into another, the effect is offset by the comic jauntiness of Prima Donna or the pavanelike stateliness of Masquerade with neat lyrics ('Masqueradepaper faces on parade,') by Charles Hart.

This last number is one of many whose effect is heightened by the masterly direction of Harold Prince and designs of Maria Bjornson. The occasion is a New Year's Eve Masked Ball at the Opera House and a grand sweeping staircase (Ms Bjornson is very fond of staircases) is filled with a kaleidoscopic harlequinade which suddenly parts to reveal the Phantom who has come as the Red Death. It is a powerful moment and it exemplifies the consistent delight in theatricality.

Prince and Bjornson throughout stress the sinister opulence of the Paris Opera with heavy, swagged curtains, bulging, gilt caryatids and, most spectacularly, a descent

into the underworld via a tilting bridge that leads to a candlefilled lake reminiscent of one of mad Ludwig's Bavarian castles. And if the famous chandelier's ascent was slightly more exciting than its ultimate descent that was because we all know that what goes up must come down.

But Prince has caught the feverish, nightmarish bustle of Leroux's Opera House without diminishing the people. Michael Crawford as the Phantom, above all, brings out the character's solitary pathos rather than his demonic horror: it is the humanity under the mask that seizes the attention, not least when his flickering, desperate hands suddenly emerge from behind an Angel of Music hovering over the lovers on the Opera House rooftop.

Sarah Brightman sings sweetly and prettily as Christine without quite suggesting she'd be the overnight toast of Paris. And even if Steve Barton can't do much with the underwritten Raoul, there is strong support from Rosemary Ashe as the displaced prima donna whose voice suddenly turns to a frogcroak and from John Savident as a comically officious Opera House manager.

In the end The Phantom works, despite the odd blank stretch, because it delights in the possibilities of theatre: from a vast prop elephant (operated by beerswilling stagehands) to the demonking disappearance of its hero through the floorsurface. It is determinedly oldfashioned but when the new fashion is for boymeetslaserbeam, it is refreshing to find a musical that pins its faith in people, narrative and traditional illusion.

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## **2. "It's fantastic, fabulous and phantasmagorical!"**

John Blake, Daily Mirror

*October 10, 1986*

It's fantastic, fabulous and phantasmagorical! From the eerily flickering lights that greet you outside Her Majesty's Theatre to the last, glorious curtain call, Andrew Lloyd Webber's longawaited new musical, Phantom of the Opera, is a triumph.

The special effects are among the most spectacular ever seen in the West End.

The music is every bit as memorable as one would expect from the man who wrote Evita, Starlight Express and the rest. But most of all, the show belongs to Sarah Brightman and Michael Crawford, who soar and swoop through their hugely demanding roles like eagles.

After all the wellpublicised false starts and backbiting, Lloyd Webber has created a musical which deserves to be around well into the next decade.

The story is based closely on the original novel of 1911 unlike most of the Phantom of the Opera films which have been made over the years.

Michael Crawford's Phantom hides his hideously disfigured face by skulking in the stage caverns and pools deep beneath the Paris opera.

His passion for music is the only thing which gives his life meaning until he becomes obsessed by Sarah Brightman's Christine a young opera singer whose beauty is matched only by the purity of her voice. He coaches her in secret while visiting dreadful catastrophes on anyone who refuses to advance her career.

A hanged scene shifter is suddenly hideously dropped on to the stage in the middle of a performance. A vast crystal chandelier crashes on to the audience. As the phantom becomes more fiendish so Christine becomes increasingly mixed in her feelings towards him.

A dreadful climax is fast approaching.

The eerie sets of the unfolding drama great stages filled with mist and shining candles are interspersed with all the colour and spectacle of the operas being prepared and presented at the theatre.

Despite all the "ghost train" theatricals the greatest thrills of the show come from Michael Crawford.

He not only sings superbly but also captures the torment of the Phantom perfectly.

If you only see one show this year, make sure it is this one!

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### **3. "Stars, Spectacle, Score, and Story"**

Jack Tinker, *Daily Mail*

*October 10, 1986*

Four words sum up the unstoppable success of Andrew Lloyd Webber's triumphant reworking of this vintage spinetingling melodrama. Stars, spectacle, score and story.

Together they add up to that old magic ingredient: theatricality. There is simply nothing on earth to transport you so quickly or so far into phantasy than a feast of illusions. And Hal Prince's production stints nothing in providing an unending banquet of the stuff.

When I get my breath back from gulping down as much as is decent in one sitting, let me deal with each item in turn.

First the star and the evening's greatest surprise. Were it not that I personally know Michael Crawford's singing teacher to be the kindest and mildest of men, I would swear that Mr Crawford had sold his soul to the Devil to acquire the rich and powerful voice with which he floods the theatre and holds us hypnotised in his presence.

The mask that for most of the evening obliterates half his face only hints at the physical horrors beneath it. But, by the time his goldenvoiced protégé has torn it aside to reveal a peeling skull and rotting flesh, he has utterly established the phantom as one of the enduring tragic figures of the modern musical; a man with a tender, gifted and loving soul whose only crime was to have been born a freak.



It is surely one of the great performances, not only in a musical but on any stage and in any year.

In this Mr Crawford is indeed fortunate to be partnered by someone as illustrious and exotically voiced as Sarah Brightman. I can think of no other actress whose glorious operatic range can match a stage present so delicately vulnerable or exquisitely beautiful.

On now to the full throttle spectacle that Maria Bjornson has conjured up to encompass all the diverse elements of the evening.

Giant chandeliers plummet from on high; great gilded angels bear Mr Crawford skyward as he sings out his heart to heaven; a lavish fancy dress masquerade underlines the sinister nature of disguise; highcamp pastiches of less than grand opera strike just the right note of comic relief while a lake of lights floats us down to the Phantom's lair beneath the great Opera House of Paris.

As for the score, it soars and instils itself into the mind like some half-forgotten refrain from Verdi, taking the story line on in great sweeps of musical sound. In its unabashed romanticism it reminds us that the Phantom is at heart a simple take of unrequited love, as inspiring and moving in its way as Romeo and Juliet, or more appropriately Beauty and the Beast.

Yet to underline the sheer theatricality of the piece the Phantom does nothing so mundane as to die for love. He vanishes in a blink before our eyes.

True there are faults but to pick them here and now would be churlish and irrelevant. Mr Lloyd Webber has another long-term tenancy and his wife has established herself as a star of status.

As for Michael Crawford there is just no other artist in the country today who can touch his command of a stage or match his daring in meeting a new challenge.

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#### **4. Richard Barkley, Sunday Express**

*October 12, 1986*

Andrew Lloyd Webber's new musical The Phantom of The Opera is a gorgeous operatic extravaganza that is a thrill to the blood and a sensual feast for the eye.

High melodrama is the key note from the start when the rich splendours of a rehearsal at the Paris Opera of Hannibal, complete with slave girls and elephant, is brought shivering short by the ghostly intervention of the phantom.

As warning blasts of brass from the 27-piece orchestra trigger our apprehension, the half-masked phantom appears behind chorus girl Christine's mirror to lure her down through a labyrinth to the candlelit intimacy of his subterranean world.

Using subtle vocal intonation and body movement in an extraordinarily moving performance, an almost unrecognisable Michael Crawford devastates us with the

anguish and despair of the phantom, a freak ultimately failing in his struggle to overcome the disfiguring mistake of nature that has rendered him unloved since birth.

Sarah Brightman's wideeyed beauty and soaring soprano voice make something individual and touching out of Christine's tussle between pity for the phantom and love for her friend and admirer, the Vicomte de Chagny (Steve Barton).

It is a lyrical high point when she expresses her sympathy for the phantom in *Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again*, a melody that carries an eerie echo of the *Pie Jesu* from Lloyd Webber's *Requiem*.

Meanwhile the evening, rooted in the Gaston Leroux novel, dispenses a great rolling buffet of musical delights.

And there is one particularly striking set piece stage by Gillian Lynne under Harold Prince's direction as the huge drapes fall back to reveal the company poised on the Opera's grand staircase for a masked ball, which is performed to the seductive syncopation of a bolero-like rhythm.

But as you rock back in your seat from sudden sunbursts of light, the reek of gunpowder and the impact of a chandelier crashing from the roof above the stalls to the stage, Michael Crawford's magnificent performance permeates all to produce a dramatic unity ultimately aching with pathos.

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### 5. "God's gift to musical theatre"

Irving Wardle, *The Times*  
*October 10, 1986*

One thing is clear: Gaston Leroux's famous story is God's gift to musical theatre. It wraps up the legends of Faust, Svengali, and Beauty and the Beast into a grand final death rattle of the romantic agony. It turns a theatre -- the Paris Opera -- into a replica of the universe, from the Statue of Apollo above the city's rooftops down to the infernal regions with their furnaces and stygian lake. And, musically, not only does it unfold to an accompaniment of the operatic repertoire, but also features a protagonist who is himself a great composer.

Some of these opportunities have been seized by Andrew Lloyd Webber and his collaborators, and projected with stunning showmanship in Harold Prince's production. But their full range has been much restricted by the decision to present the events above all as a tragic love story.

That indeed is the mainspring of Leroux's plot in which the hideously deformed Erik, hiding in the catacombs of the theatre, conceives a desperate passion for the young soprano, Christine, teaches her to sing like an angel, and then spirits her away to his lair when an aristocratic rival -- the gallant young Raoul -- appears on the scene. But Erik is also a prankster in the ETA-Hoffmann tradition and much of the story's vitality depends on the jokes he plays on the opera's employees and its wretched managers.

The musical opens with an auction, long after the events, showing the aged Raoul snapping up mementos of his youthful romance -- rather along the lines of Zeffirelli's posthumous prelude to *Traviata*. That sets the sombre tone of the evening. And after a brisk rehearsal scene, showing the coryphees and the vastly self-satisfied lead singers battling through an old war-horse called *Hannibal*, with a full-scale elephant, romance closes in. Raoul pursues Christine to her dressing room where he is overheard by the Phantom, who promptly materializes through the magic mirror and leads her down to his house by the lake.

This is the biggest miscalculation in Richard Stilgoe's book: as it reveals the Phantom as a man from the start instead of springing that disclosure after a succession of seemingly supernatural incidents. As a result, there is precious little thrill in hearing his disembodied voice or witnessing his apparition as the Mask of Red Death at the company's masquerade party. Nor do we ever learn how he performs his tricks. Instead of revealing them as the work of a master ventriloquist and conjurer, they remain unexplained mysteries somehow performed by a man whose only visible skill is to crash out dischords on his subterranean harmonium.

Elsewhere, Mr Stilgoe has worked wonders of dramatic compression: creating the intensely sinister figure of a ballet mistress (Mary Millar) who acts as a stone-faced messenger between the Phantom and his victims; and reconstructing the disruption of a performance by breaking up a balletic *entra'acte* with the descent of a hanged man from the flies. I suspect, though, that the sharp-witted Mr Stilgoe was not the man for the love lyrics; which have been produced in saccharin abundance by Charles Hart. This may be the kind of material Lloyd Webber wanted to set; but as both lovers approach Christine on similar terms, offering comfort, warmth, and protection, a monotony sets in well before the Phantom yields to the better man and vanishes into a trick piece of furniture.

The book, however, has much more importance than in his previous work; and this time the score is not through-composed in a continuous idiom. Instead it moves between 19th century opera (discarding Leroux's *Faust* in favour of risible pastiche), atmospheric and love music in his own lucious vein, and the compositions of the ghost himself. The power of the score depends much more on contrast than on any individual item. Lullaby like romantic numbers are poisoned by menacingly surging undercurrents. These turn out only to be descending chromatic scales on the brass, but they serve their turn. When it comes to rehearsing the ghost's own opera (another Stilgoe innovation) it is great fun to discover that tenor lead cannot get the hang of whole-tone scales. Elsewhere the presence of the supernatural is expressively signalled by unrelated minor chords descending in parallel like the endless trapdoors leading down to the cellars of the theatre.

One thing the production should do is to confirm the vocal powers of Sarah Brightman, a blanched victim with huge panic-stricken eyes, who combines a honeyed middle register with the unearthly top notes I first thrilled to when she sang Charles Strouse's *Nightingale*. Michael Crawford as the Phantom is a worthy vocal partner, but it is a pity that he should have such small opportunity to display his other skills.

## 6. Mark Steyn, *The Independent*

*October 11, 1986*

Thirty years ago, *Damn Yankees*, produced by Harold Prince, articulated the first rule of musical theatre: “You gotta have Heart”, sage advice which both Prince and Andrew Lloyd Webber, now re-united as director and composer of *The Phantom of the Opera*, have on occasion chosen to ignore. Gaston Leroux’s 1911 novel, however, has the key ingredient in spades. A confused heroine is torn between a handsome aristocrat and a misunderstood misfit who haunts the Paris Opéra - real emotion, a world away from *Starlight Express* and co. Indeed, in one of *Phantom*’s “opera-within-an-opera” scenes, Prince manages a sly dig at the technological gimmick shows by bringing on a giant elephant, inside of which two bored stage-hands are playing cards. Unlike *Time and Mutiny*, where it diverts attention from the inadequacies of the drama, the technology here (a crashing chandelier, a lake) actually services the show.

Lloyd Webber has described *Phantom* as a return to the values of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and at moments his rich, soaring melodies are worthy of either Rodgers or Kern at their most lyrical (although “Angel Of Music” struck me as reminiscent of the middle section in Sondheim’s “Not While I’m Around” and, blow me, as I stumbled out into the Haymarket, that’s exactly what a fellow first-nighter was singing). The score, however, is dreadfully unbalanced. For every “Some Enchanted Evening”, Rodgers had a “Nothin’ Like A Dame”. Here, the only upbeat number is the forceful title song, which serves as a very heavy leitmotif.

Most of the tunes are reprised, but only one to any theatrical effect: “Masquerade” opens the Second Act as a splashy production number, then returns at the end as a poignant solo for Michael Crawford (as the Phantom). The other themes recur with different lyrics, which reflect no credit on their writers, Charles Hart and Richard Stilgoe. When a melody has six sets of words, it usually means none of them are right. “Hey, Big Spender”, for example, says what the music says, and nobody would dream of reprising it as “When’s The Mail Due?” or “How’s Your Meatloaf?”. And when a tune can be sung by any of the principal characters (as most of *Phantom*’s are), it also indicates something is wrong: try swapping Eliza’s and Professor Higgins’ and see if *My Fair Lady* still makes sense.

Oscar Hammerstein wrote warm, tender songs, stuffed with precise images: as Goethe put it, the poet should write about the specific and, if he is any good, he will express the universal. These lyrics are bland, vague, worthier of a Victor Herbert or Franz Lehar score: “soon you’ll be beside me/you’ll guard me and you’ll guide me”. Elsewhere, Lloyd Webber’s often attractive melodies have their impact diminished by being perversely under-rhymed, while the solitary comic number is obtrusively over-rhymed and yet remains resolutely unfunny...

In other areas, though, “*Phantom*” has much to be admired. Maria Björnson, the designer, has imbued the Opera House with an authentically musty, cobwebbed atmosphere. Sarah Brightman makes an irresistible heroine. The text does not provide her with much, but a combination of sheer gusto, ethereal top notes and those Jessie Matthews eyes sees her through. She hams it up splendidly as the principal boy in the

mock opera *Il Muto*. Michael Crawford, the West End's outstanding musical actor, is shamefully underused here, although what he does he does well.

The musical opens with a spoken prologue, an innovation which the rest of the show fails to live up to. *Starlight Express* brought the form to the edge of the abyss; *The Phantom of the Opera* takes it back a few yards, but we're not out of the danger zone yet...

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### 7. "A Monster-Meets-Girl Romance"

William A. Henry III, *Time Magazine*  
*October 27, 1986*

As the copyright on Gaston Leroux's 1911 thriller *The Phantom of the Opera* expired this year, plans were announced for no fewer than three competing musical adaptations. The flurry of interest was perplexing. Leroux's tale, part horror melodrama, part bodice-ripping gothic, seemed too grim and kinky for a musical. The central character is, after all, not only hideously ugly but an extortionist, kidnaper, incendiary and megalomaniac -- and the heroine must at least halfway fall in love with him.

The winners of the race to stage a *Phantom* in a major commercial setting, Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and Director Harold Prince, have proved the shrewdness of their unlikely impulse. Within two days after the \$3 million spectacular opened in London's West End this month, the box office was virtually sold out until early 1987. Webber and Prince have daringly envisioned *Phantom* not as *Grand Guignol* but as an opportunity to turn the musical back toward what they term romance. Ironically, Lloyd Webber (*Evita*) and Prince (*Sweeney Todd*) have been leaders in the movement to push musicals beyond traditional boy-meets-girl accessibility. Yet their *Phantom* is unquestionably a love story, just as much for the heroine, a baffled girl from the chorus, as for the masked enigma who spirits her down to the labyrinthine bowels of the Paris Opera House to teach her to become a star.

It is often said of Lloyd Webber's musicals that the show is the star, and of Prince's stagings that the director is the star. Both dicta might apply to *Phantom*, which is opulently costumed, lushly scored, full of spectacular stage pictures and chockablock with pastiches of 19th century warhorse opera. But in the midst of all the mechanics there are 2 1/2 performances that achieve some emotional depth. Michael Crawford commands the stage as the *Phantom*, bringing complete conviction to such fantasies as a midair descent on a chariot of gilded cherubs and a boating trip on a subterranean lake dotted with candelabra. As his alternately terrified and thrilled disciple, Sarah Brightman is more singer than actress but still manages to suggest a neurasthenic obsession with the *Phantom*. The half performance comes from erstwhile Ballet Dancer Steve Barton, who looks good and sings well as Christine's real-world lover but is unable to bring much color to the role.

Musically *Phantom* is at once more sophisticated and less hummably memorable than most of Lloyd Webber's shows. There is no song to compare with *Memory* in *Cats*. Instead there are sequences that verge on opera, the most ambitious being a quasi-

Mozartian septet. Unfortunately, the wit and scholarship of his tunes are nowhere echoed in Hart's lyrics, which oscillate between the banal and the impenetrable.

The show's most serious shortcoming is its scant supply of sentiment. Because the narrative hurtles immediately into action, it takes quite a while to involve the audience with the characters. Then, just when it has developed the Phantom as a pathetic blend of noble genius and physical freak, it turns him into an almost random murderer. In an ideal entertainment, there must be someone to root for. But as Alice noted of a wonderland no more demented or enchanted than the Phantom's opera house, they are all very unpleasant people here.

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### **8. "Phantom of the Opera"**

Frank Rich, New York Times

*January 27, 1988*

It may be possible to have a terrible time at "The Phantom of the Opera," but you'll have to work at it. Only a terminal prig would let the avalanche of pre-opening publicity poison his enjoyment of this show, which usually wants nothing more than to shower the audience with fantasy and fun, and which often succeeds, at any price.

It would be equally ludicrous, however --- and an invitation to severe disappointment --- to let the hype kindle the hope that "Phantom" is a credible heir to the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals that haunt both Andrew Lloyd Webber's creative aspirations and the Majestic Theater as persistently as the evening's title character does.

What one finds instead is a characteristic Lloyd Webber project -- long on pop professionalism and melody, impoverished of artistic personality and passion -- that the director Harold Prince, the designer Maria Bjornson and the mesmerizing actor Michael Crawford have elevated quite literally to the roof. "The Phantom of the Opera" is as much a victory of dynamic stagecraft over musical kitsch as it is a triumph of merchandising *uber alles*.

As you've no doubt heard, "Phantom" is Mr. Lloyd Webber's first sustained effort at writing an old-fashioned romance between people instead of cats or trains. The putative lovers are the Paris Opera House phantom (Mr. Crawford) and a chorus singer named Christine Daae (Sarah Brightman). But Mr. Crawford's moving portrayal of the hero notwithstanding, the show's most persuasive love story is Mr. Prince's and Ms. Bjornson's unabashed crush on the theater itself, from footlights to dressing rooms, from flies to trap doors.

A gothic backstage melodrama, "Phantom" taps right into the obsessions of the designer and the director. At the Royal Shakespeare Company, Ms. Bjornson was a wizard of darkness, monochromatic palettes and mysterious grand staircases.

Mr. Prince, a prince of darkness in his own right, is the master of the towering bridge ("Evita"), the labyrinthine inferno ("Sweeney Todd") and the musical-within-the-musical ("Follies").

In "Phantom," the creative personalities of these two artists merge with a literal lightning flash at the opening coup de theatre, in which the auditorium is transformed from gray decrepitude to the gold-and-crystal Second Empire glory of the Paris Opera House.

Though the sequence retreads the famous Ziegfeld palace metamorphosis in "Follies," Ms. Bjornson's magical eye has allowed Mr. Prince to reinvent it, with electrifying showmanship. The physical production, Andrew Bridge's velvety lighting included, is a tour de force throughout -- as extravagant of imagination as of budget.

Ms. Bjornson drapes the stage with layers of Victorian theatrical curtains -- heavily tasseled front curtains, fire curtains, backdrops of all antiquated styles -- and then constantly shuffles their configurations so we may view the opera house's stage from the perspective of its audience, the performers or the wings.

For an added lift, we visit the opera-house roof, with its cloud-swept view of a twinkling late-night Paris, and the subterranean lake where the Phantom travels by gondola to a baroque secret lair that could pass for the lobby of Grauman's Chinese Theater. The lake, awash in dry-ice fog and illuminated by dozens of candelabra, is a masterpiece of campy phallic Hollywood iconography -- it's Liberace's vision of hell.

There are horror-movie special effects, too, each elegantly staged and unerringly paced by Mr. Prince. The imagery is so voluptuous that one can happily overlook the fact that the book (by the composer and Richard Stilgoe) contains only slightly more plot than "Cats," with scant tension or suspense. This "Phantom," more skeletal but not briefer than other adaptations of the 1911 Gaston Leroux novel, is simply a beast-meets-beauty, loses-beauty story, attenuated by the digressions of disposable secondary characters (the liveliest being Judy Kaye's oft-humiliated diva) and by Mr. Lloyd Webber's unchecked penchant for forcing the show to cool its heels while he hawks his wares.

In Act II, the heroine travels to her father's grave for no reason other than to sell an extraneous ballad whose tepid greeting-card sentiments ("Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again") dispel the evening's smoldering mood. The musical's dramatic thrust is further slowed by three self-indulgently windy opera parodies -- in which the sophisticated tongue-in-cheek wit of Ms. Bjornson's sumptuous period sets and costumes is in no way matched by Gillian Lynne's repetitive, presumably satirical ballet choreography or by Mr. Lloyd Webber's tiresome collegiate jokes at the expense of such less than riotous targets as Meyerbeer.

Aside from the stunts and set changes, the evening's histrionic peaks are Mr. Crawford's entrances -- one of which is the slender excuse for Ms. Bjornson's most dazzling display of Technicolor splendor, the masked ball ("Masquerade") that opens Act II.

Mr. Crawford's appearances are eagerly anticipated, not because he's really scary but because his acting gives "Phantom" most of what emotional heat it has. His face obscured by a half-mask -- no minor impediment -- Mr. Crawford uses a booming, expressive voice and sensuous hands to convey his desire for Christine.

His Act I declaration of love, "The Music of the Night" -- in which the Phantom calls on his musical prowess to bewitch the heroine -- proves as much a rape as a seduction.

Stripped of the mask an act later to wither into a crestfallen, sweaty, cadaverous misfit, he makes a pitiful sight while clutching his beloved's discarded wedding veil.

Those who visit the Majestic expecting only to applaud a chandelier -- or who have 20-year-old impressions of Mr. Crawford as the lightweight screen juvenile of "The Knack" and "Hello, Dolly!" -- will be stunned by the force of his Phantom.

It's deflating that the other constituents of the story's love triangle don't reciprocate his romantic or sexual energy. The icily attractive Ms. Brightman possesses a lush soprano by Broadway standards (at least as amplified), but reveals little competence as an actress. After months of playing "Phantom" in London, she still simulates fear and affection alike by screwing her face into bug-eyed, chipmunk-cheeked poses more appropriate to the Lon Chaney film version.

Steve Barton, as the Vicomte who lures her from the beast, is an affable professional escort with unconvincingly bright hair.

Thanks to the uniform strength of the voices -- and the soaring, Robert Russell Bennett-style orchestrations -- Mr. Lloyd Webber's music is given every chance to impress.

There are some lovely tunes, arguably his best yet, and, as always, they are recycled endlessly: if you don't leave the theater humming the songs, you've got a hearing disability. But the banal lyrics, by Charles Hart and Mr. Stilgoe, prevent the score's prettiest music from taking wing. The melodies don't find shape as theater songs that might touch us by giving voice to the feelings or actions of specific characters.

Instead, we get numbing, interchangeable pseudo-Hammersteinisms like "Say you'll love me every waking moment" or "Think of me, think of me fondly, when we say goodbye".

With the exception of "Music of the Night" -- which seems to express from its author's gut a desperate longing for acceptance -- Mr. Lloyd Webber has again written a score so generic that most of the songs could be reordered and redistributed among the characters (indeed, among other Lloyd Webber musicals) without altering the show's story or meaning. The one attempt at highbrow composing, a noisy and gratuitous septet called "Prima Donna," is unlikely to take a place beside the similar Broadway operatics of Bernstein, Sondheim or Loesser.

Yet for now, if not forever, Mr. Lloyd Webber is a genuine phenomenon -- not an invention of the press or ticket scalpers -- and "Phantom" is worth seeing not only for its punch as high-gloss entertainment but also as a fascinating key to what the phenomenon is about.

Mr. Lloyd Webber's esthetic has never been more baldly stated than in this show, which favors the decorative trappings of art over the troublesome substance of culture



and finds more eroticism in rococo opulence and conspicuous consumption than in love or sex.

Mr. Lloyd Webber is a creature, perhaps even a prisoner, of his time; with "The Phantom of the Opera," he remakes La Belle Epoque in the image of our own Gilded Age. If by any chance this musical doesn't prove Mr. Lloyd Webber's most popular, it won't be his fault, but another sign that times are changing and that our boom era, like the opera house's chandelier, is poised to go bust.

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### 9. "Manifold Delights in the 'Phantom'"

Allan Wallach, Newsday

*January 27, 1988*

"THE PHANTOM of the Opera" is sold out so far into the future that people may one day be declaring their all-but-unobtainable tickets in wills and divorce settlements. So it's largely to comfort those who have already purchased their tickets rather than to discomfort those who delayed that I report that the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical is every bit as stunning on Broadway as in London.

Why this show makes so overwhelming an impact takes a little explaining. The story, after all, is drawn from a novel by a minor French novelist that's been around, largely unread, since 1911. And while Lloyd Webber's music has a lush, romantic sweep, so does that of many operas that don't compel such astonishing attention.

The triumph of "The Phantom of the Opera" lies in the amalgam of virtually all its elements into as gloriously theatrical a show as we've had in recent memory. They coalesce into a musical of manifold delights: Harold Prince's virtuoso direction, the performances led by Michael Crawford and Sarah Brightman, the spectacle created by a brilliant design team, the beautifully sung music and Gillian Lynne's period choreography.

But yes, there are some faults. For me, after seeing the show in its London and New York productions and listening to the London cast album, Lloyd Webber's music has some problematical aspects. Though I think it is the finest of his career, he has relied excessively on a few musical motifs for the central characters. And Charles Hart's lyrics fall far short of sophisticated, even for a melodramatic story such as this one.

It's the totality, though, that matters. "Phantom," like Lloyd Webber's "Cats," succeeds by establishing a special milieu - a world where, once willingly entered, we surrender to a story that might seem ludicrous in a less evocative context.

That world is the Paris Opera House during la Belle Epoque. Gaston Leroux, author of the novel that became the basis for so many varied treatments, drew upon the fact that beneath the opera house were a honeycomb of passages and a lake, and that a chandelier counterweight had once fallen on the audience. These things are central to his story of a horribly disfigured Phantom, a masked "opera ghost" who tyrannizes all who work at the opera and is himself the slave of a hopeless love for the young singer Christine Daae. Casting a mesmeric spell, he is the Svengali to her Trilby, the Beast to her Beauty.

The book by Richard Stilgoe and Lloyd Webber, differing in some particulars from the novel and the famous 1925 silent film, gives the affair an erotic undertow, an overripe mood of sexual repression and decay that is deepened by Lloyd Webber's seductive melodies. This is his most operatic score to date, both because of his Puccini-scented music for the blighted romance and the opera pastiches incorporated elsewhere.

Giving a performance likely to be remembered for decades, Crawford is extraordinary as the Phantom. It would be hard to imagine the musical without his magnetic presence and eerie tenor, without the poignantly broken figure he becomes. Brightman, possessed of a lovely soprano and fragile beauty, is an ideal Christine. (The musical, however, was equally compelling when I saw it in London with an unknown replacement, and I'm sure those who see the talented Patti Cohenour at certain performances will not be shortchanged.)

In the largely recast production, the most effective work is done by Steve Barton as the young aristocrat who loves Christine, Cris Groenendaal as an impresario, Elisa Heinsohn as a dancer and Leila Martin as her mysterious mother. I wasn't taken with Judy Kaye's campy performance as the reigning diva whom Christine replaces.

This is a musical, though, in which the production itself is the star. Much of its effect is the work of the gifted designer Maria Bjornson, who has created a magnificently ornate opera house, a shadowy underground labyrinth, a mist-shrouded lake dotted with candles and, everywhere, gorgeous costumes. Andrew Bridge's lighting is a dazzle of light and shadow.

In such settings, anything is possible - from a crashing chandelier to a Phantom hurling firebolts. Special effects such as these can, of course, be duplicated elsewhere. Here, they are among the elements that draw us into a haunting world, as irresistibly as the Phantom leads Christine into his subterranean lair.

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### **10. "Music Of The Night: The Phantom Of The Opera"**

William A Henry III, Time Magazine

*February 8, 1988*

Even if The Phantom of the Opera were the greatest show on earth, probably nothing in the way of actual experience could measure up to the hoopla that preceded last week's U.S. debut of the monster-meets-girl musical. No previous offering in Broadway history has rivaled the \$18 million advance sale for Phantom, a commitment made by hundreds of thousands of people to pay up to \$50 a ticket, generally before having had a chance to hear any of the songs, read any reviews or acquire the vaguest familiarity with the imported-from-London stars.

Some of the show's lures are known commodities: Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber (Cats, Jesus Christ Superstar) and Director Harold Prince (Cabaret, Follies) have mounted some of the flashiest spectacles of recent years, including their prior collaboration, Evita. Practically everyone, it seems, has seen a movie version of Phantom, although few have read Gaston Leroux's turgid 1910 thriller about the

hideously misshapen genius who constitutes himself the shadow ruler of the Paris Opera House and, upon becoming infatuated with a chorine, maneuvers her career from afar. The beauty-and-the-beast theme and subterranean wonderland setting echo the myths of Persephone, Pygmalion and Faust and also temporarily embrace Freudian metaphors of sexual awakening. The Broadway launch has been boosted by publicity about Phantom in London, where, since its debut in October 1986, virtually the only way to get in on short notice has been to belong to the royal family: the Princess of Wales, a particular fan, has attended four times.

These rational factors go only part way in explaining the extraordinary anticipation that Phantom has aroused. The show apparently taps into yearnings for a transporting sensory and mystical experience: in a word, for magic. On that primal level, despite considerable and at times embarrassing shortcomings, Phantom powerfully delivers. The story may be muddled, the characters sketchy, some performances shallow and the music often slushily derivative. So what. For those who seek an equivalent to a ride through the Haunted Mansion at Walt Disney World -- seemingly a vast proportion of today's Broadway audience -- Phantom is a brilliantly manipulated journey, scary yet ultimately unthreatening. A prime example is the show's most celebrated effect, the gasp-evoking plummet from the ceiling almost to the floor of a 1,500-lb. chandelier. Many spectators arrive knowing it will drop, and the staging gives plenty of clues to the rest. Equally, however, audiences can trust that the "danger" will be averted at the last possible minute, so the dread is purely titillating, without a hint of life's real pains and perils.

The Phantom, described as a scholar, seems more a necromancer, dematerializing, teleporting, even dodging bullets. He defies the laws of gravity and physics: his kingdom in the bowels of the Paris Opera House is reached by rowing across a subterranean lake through which candelabra rise and descend, mysteriously unquenched. The lagoon seems to be at or above the level of his hideaway, yet his chambers remain unflooded. Allow oneself a moment's skepticism and the story turns to piffle. But audiences give themselves over to the fantasy concocted by Prince and Designer Maria Bjornson, letting logic evanesce as long as the sights and sounds are glorious. Which they are: bolts of lightning, carpets of fog and flashes of fire compete with the Phantom's midair descent in a chariot of gilded cherubs and his final disappearance while sitting on a solid-looking throne.

These effects are meant to be balanced by a love story, or rather two competing ones: the conventional passion between a handsome young vicomte and a chorus girl, and the dark, obsessive bond between that same young woman and the Phantom, who seeks to win her devotion by making her a star. The maiden is thus expected to choose between outward beauty and the beauty of the soul and, in protofeminist fashion, between status as a rich man's wife and acclaim as an artist in her own right. As befits a fantasy, she gets both by virtue of a brief display of compassion.

The three principal roles are again played by the actors who originated them in London, and therein lies the show's chief weakness. As the Phantom -- musically, a tenor good guy rather than a baritone baddie -- Michael Crawford gives the most compelling performance currently to be found on any Broadway stage. The character is an extortionist, kidnaper, incendiary and murderer. Yet as Lloyd Webber conceived him and Crawford plays him, he is also a romantic capable of true selflessness and is

all too easily forgiven. As his rival, Steve Barton is blandly tuneful and smugly self-assured, which is all the role demands. The narrative tension is meant to emanate mainly from the virginal Christine, the part Lloyd Webber wrote for his wife Sarah Brightman. Vocally she has the needed equipment: her soprano is clear and sounds youthfully innocent along a wide range. But as an actress she has learned almost nothing from years in the role. Her vocabulary of gesture is limited to a flutter of hands and a gape of astonishment, accented by huge black circles of makeup around her eyes that cause her to resemble a raccoon. Brightman's Maypole figure, long nose and prominent overbite do not aid in explaining why both men adore her. But these deficiencies might be overcome if she displayed the least hint of star quality, or even stage presence, instead of acting like Minnie Mouse on Quaaludes.

Lloyd Webber gives his wife every help, beginning with her vocal introduction. Although Phantom is garlanded with opera pastiche, it subliminally nudges opera aside in favor of pop by offering the winsome ballad Think of Me first in the overripe, rococo style of a diva (Judy Kaye), then in Brightman's appealingly unadorned rendition. The device hints that the Phantom and his chosen instrument will become the means for remaking musical entertainment. If that claim is to be taken as Lloyd Webber's judgment of his own role in the theater, however, it seems premature. His knack for crafting hit tunes is offset by their interchangeability among characters and situations, plus a tin ear for lyrics and lyricists. Moreover, nothing in Phantom compares with Memory in Cats. The melody that comes closest, The Music of the Night, contains a repeated phrase that seems to quote Come to Me, Bend to Me from Brigadoon, a show that had true magic, fantasy and romance and that embodied a tradition of Broadway quality Lloyd Webber has not come close to matching.

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### **11. "A grand 'Opera'"**

Howard Kissel, New York Daily News

*January 27, 1998*

Contrary to what you might imagine, "Phantom of the Opera" is more than just a show about a chandelier.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical version of the fable about the masked man who haunts the Paris Opera is a longing look back at the stagecraft, the sense of wonder, theater had a century ago.

It is a spectacular entertainment, visually the most impressive of the British musicals. Perhaps the most old-fashioned thing about it is it's a love story, something Broadway has not seen for quite a while.

To say the score is Lloyd Webber's best is not saying a great deal. His music always has a synthetic, borrowed quality to it. As you listen you find yourself wondering where you've heard it before. In this case you've heard a lot of it in Puccini, in the work of other Broadway composers and even the Beatles.

Nevertheless he seems to be borrowing from better sources, and he has much greater sophistication about putting it all together. There are some droll opera parodies,

several beautiful songs, an impressive septet and a grand choral number, all richly orchestrated.

His lack of originality is apparent in the music he writes for the Phantom's opera, which is merely harsh, not interesting. There is also a sequence with a heavy rock bass so cheap it might have been composed for "Starlight Express." Nevertheless, the score has an undeniable romantic surge. And after all, when was the last time you heard an unabashed love duet on Broadway? That accounts for much of the "Phantom's" appeal.

Much of its success is due to Michael Crawford's powerful performance as the Phantom. Crawford is strong both at underplaying the Phantom's villainy and at getting the maximum out of his final anguish. Steve Barton, as his rival, is an equally forceful singer and stage presence.

In the role of Christine, Sarah Brightman is fine. She has a cultivated soprano voice, a bit coy-sounding at times. Clearly her husband has written the music to demonstrate her range. The sound, however, is not warm, and her work seems very calculated. As an actress, she's not special. (Oddly, her eyes are so heavily made up they recall Lon Chaney in the title role.) Was she indispensable? Hardly.

Judy Kaye is funny and vocally impressive as a rival singer, and Leila Martin is strong as the Phantom's ally. David Romano is delightful as a comic tenor. There are no weak links in the cast.

What sets "Phantom" apart is the extraordinary imaginative work of Maria Bjornson, whose sets and costumes are a breathtaking, witty, sensual tribute to 19th century theater. Her constantly unfolding magic is hauntingly lit by Andrew Bridge.

The characters are not fleshed out, the lyrics are forgettable and the melodramatic plot is not as evocative as it might be. (Crawford's grief in the last scene is almost too deep for the material.) Nevertheless, that master conjurer Hal Prince has woven these seemingly outmoded materials into a grand evening of theater.

As for the chandelier, I should probably bemoan the attention focused on a "special effect." But I can't be upset to hear people gasp as it sways above them or give faint cries of delight as it swoops over them.

No one is really scared, especially since they've been reading about it for the last year and a half. As someone who knows theater must please more than just the mind, the sheer fun of the chandelier and "Phantom" seems a happy sign for Broadway.

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## **12. "The Phantom Of The Opera"**

Richard Hummler, *Variety*

*January 27, 1998*

The London audiences aren't wrong. "The Phantom Of The Opera" is romantic musical theater hokum in the grand manner - hokum cordon blue - and it justifies the

feverish buildup that has given it a \$16,500,000 advance. It's good for a Broadway run of several years.

Andrew Lloyd Webber has taken the Gaston Leroux potboiler about the love-crazed disfigured genius who lives in the catacombs of the Paris Opera and fashioned it into a thrilling and musically rich mass legit entertainment. The 19th century period spectacle, scenic legerdemain, soaring melodies and exceptional singing are at the service of an involving and piquantly offbeat love story, all of it staged with brilliantly organized flair by Harold Prince, back in top form.

Given the near-hysterical anticipation aroused by this latest, big berth West End musical smash, "it's not that good" will probably become a familiar refrain along the byways of Broadway. No, it's not "South Pacific" or "Fiddler On The Roof," but it's a major achievement in the musical theater and a high water mark in the phenomenal Lloyd Webber career. The bonus this time is that the glittering technical wizardry and pop-opera music have been wedded to a strong story and characters.

Chill-seekers may be disappointed, because this is a romantic "Phantom" in which the title hero is a sensitive artist ravaged by unrequited love, and not a rampaging early slasher. Lloyd Webber and co-librettist Richard Stilgoe have put the emphasis on the beauty-and-the-beast theme and develop an affecting yarn in the scarred recluse's obsessive passion for the beautiful opera chorine.

The show has a flashback structure, opening in 1911 with an eerily effective auction of props from the Paris Opera and jumping back to the 1881 melodramatics when the supernaturally gifted dungeon-dweller terrorized the theater. The period glitz is an eye-popping delight, with the onstage and backstage atmosphere artfully heightened but not cartooned.

The authors lay in the exposition smoothly, then move into high gear as the masked man of mystery whisks the entranced actress to his dungeon lair at the nether side of an underground lake beneath the opera house. The trip's a visceral pip as he ferries her to his cave across the lake lit by scores of candles rising from the water, to the throbbing music of the title song.

Few if any "Phantom" -goers will remain unhooked as title roler Michael Crawford seduces the dazed heroine in his candelabra-lit hideout to the propulsive chords of "The Music Of The Night," a patented Lloyd Webber rouser and a model of dramatic musical construction.

That's just one among an abundance of big-melody tunes in a great score that evokes period Hollywood film music, opera grand and light, operetta and especially pop Broadway of the classic era. The love ballad for heroine Christine and her aristocratic swain, "All I Ask Of You," is irresistible and worthy of comparison to Rodgers and Kern.

Not the least of the show's pleasures is the pride of place it gives to vocalizing. No musical in years has had better singing. Sarah Brightman's voice gets a through workout, and while it may not be of premier operatic quality, it's a lovely lyric soprano ideally suited to Lloyd Webber's clever music.

Crawford shows himself to be an exceptional singing actor who knows how to vary his sound for dramatic effect. And Judy Kaye, playing the large-ego diva whom Brightman supplants, sings the opera parodies with pleasing skill. The choral singing is clear and full-bodied.

The show's stagecraft is sensational, with scenic transitions that dazzle with their speed and ingenuity. Maria Bjornson's designs are marvels of period atmospheric detail and technical savvy (that Tony can be bestowed right now), and the costumes are grandly extravagant fun.

From Prince, it's the best show business staging since "Follies," always theatrical but in tight focus for the key moments of dramatic import.

Playing behind a mask, Crawford makes a fully developed human figure of the larger-than-life mad genius. His climactic scene with Brightman, as he sobs at her expression of love, has real pathos and moves the audience.

Brightman, as noted, is an exceptional singer and a competent if less than overpowering acting personality. Judy Kaye makes an expert pro's contribution as singer and comic actress. Steve Barton sings robustly and acts forcefully as the straight-arrow winner of the heroine's heart. Leila Martin, Cris Groenendaal and Nicholas Wyman supply accomplished performances in the secondary roles.

If it can't be said that "Phantom" advances the artistic frontier of the musical theater, it's more than welcome as a gloriously old fashioned romantic musical spectacle. And while Lloyd Webber may not be the most original of composers, he's an undeniably great showman with a seemingly unerring sense of popular taste. He's making musical theater history, and "Phantom" will be making musical theater money for years to come.

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### **13. "The phantom of the opera"**

Clive Barnes, New York Post

*January 27, 1998*

Technically it is a piece of impeccably crafted musical theater, with theme, music and staging in perfect accord. They combine as a total statement that depends for its potency more on the sum of its parts than on the strength of any individual component.

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### **14. "The Phantom Of The Opera"**

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*January 26, 1998*

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### **15. "El fantasma de la Ópera sorprende con una versión española cargada de pasión"**

M. José Díaz de Tuesta, El País  
*4 de septiembre de 2002*

El misterio de un fantasma prisionero de las pasiones más humanas que recorría los sótanos del célebre teatro de París de principios de siglo ha alimentado ya la imaginación de 70 millones de espectadores de todo mundo. El musical El fantasma de la Ópera, de Andrew Lloyd Webber, se estrena hoy en España después de tres años de trabajo previo. Siendo fiel a la versión original que se estrenó en Londres en 1986, lo que no se ha podido evitar, ni se ha querido, es que esta versión fuera la más apasionada. Otra de las novedades es que todo el elenco es español.

Abruma el montaje que este musical arrastra por los teatros más famosos del mundo: la deslumbrante réplica de la lámpara de araña del teatro de París está compuesta de 6.000 cuentas, mide tres metros y pesa una tonelada; en cada actuación aparecen 230 trajes, cada cual más espectacular; 250 kilos de hielo seco y 10 máquinas de niebla y humo reproducen las noches de la belle époque de aquel París bohemio. Desde hace 16 años este musical, basado en la novela homónima de Gastón Leroux y llevada al cine por primera vez en 1925, se ha estrenado en 96 ciudades de 18 países y ha sido representado con gran éxito en más de 6.000 ocasiones.

En España se representará únicamente en Madrid (se barajó también Barcelona, pero su productora, CIE, ayer lo descartó), en el teatro Lope de Vega, todos los días de la semana salvo los lunes. Los primeros datos de taquilla confirman que va a tener llenazo. En la preventa del pasado lunes se habían vendido 20.000 entradas.

Lo más dificultoso para poner en pie esta obra en España fue elegir a los personajes. Hubo un casting entre 2.000 aspirantes y al final se logró casi lo imposible: que todos los intérpretes fueran españoles, a diferencia de su representación en otros países, donde hubo que recurrir a actores extranjeros. De este logro está especialmente orgulloso su director en España, Arthur Masella. 'En una producción lo más difícil siempre es elegir al equipo y en este caso somos muy afortunados porque todos tienen mucho talento, pero estoy especialmente orgulloso de los tres protagonistas', contaba ayer en la presentación en Madrid.

Las cualidades que a su juicio tienen que tener los elegidos son algo mucho más que una buena voz, 'es la combinación de ésta con la capacidad de baile y actuación, que se tiene que dar de una forma unitaria y especial'. Luis Amando será el afortunado que interpretará al fantasma. Cuando se le preguntó si resiste la comparación con otros fantasmas consideró que después de ver al de Londres se sentía 'más apasionado'. Además lleva con mucha soltura esa máscara, cuyo maquillaje requiere dos horas en colocarse y treinta minutos en quitarla. 'Al principio me molestaba un poco, ahora es como mi segunda piel'.

La máscara la lleva porque El fantasma de la Ópera es la historia de un personaje que, según su autor, existió en la realidad: un aristócrata genial, pero marcado por una deformidad física (lo cual ha hecho que se especulara mucho sobre su sexualidad). Lo que sigue es el conflicto de amor, celos y muerte que desencadena un trío amoroso.

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## **16. “«El fantasma de la ópera» encuentra sótano en Madrid”**

Julio Bravo, ABC  
*1 de septiembre 2002*

Desde su estreno en Londres en octubre de 1986, han sido varias las tentativas de traer a España «El fantasma de la ópera». Nombres populares como los de Raphael o Camilo Sesto (que incluso ha realizado una grabación «clandestina») han estado en algún momento asociados a los rumores sobre su puesta en escena. Los derechos han pasado de mano en mano hasta que han recalado en la empresa CIE, que por fin pone en pie en el Teatro Lope de Vega el más importante musical de las últimas décadas.

Hace casi un año que empezaron las audiciones para encontrar a los intérpretes de la producción española de «El fantasma de la ópera». Hasta Madrid se desplazaron Arthur Masella y Kirsten Blodgett, director asociado y supervisora musical respectivamente del montaje. Los dos llevan ya varios fantasmas en su mochila y sabían bien lo que querían.

En 1971, Andrew Lloyd Webber vio como el director de escena Tom O'Horgan «destrozaba» (el compositor así lo creía, al menos) «Jesus Christ Superstar», que suponía además su presentación en Nueva York. Esa mala experiencia le llevó años más tarde a exigir que todas las producciones que se hicieran de sus obras en cualquier lugar del mundo fueran exactamente iguales que la original. En Madrid, por tanto, veremos la misma escenografía, el mismo vestuario, la misma iluminación y los mismos movimientos escénicos que en Londres o Nueva York, donde todavía se representa este musical; de eso se han encargado las decenas de técnicos y supervisores que han venido de Londres para trabajar en el montaje.

La labor de elección de los protagonistas no fue fácil, y al final los productores se decidieron por un trío joven y desconocido para el público: Luis Amando (Fantasma), Felicidad Farag (Christine) y Armando Pita (Raúl). «Son intérpretes con calidad más que notable, y creemos que la obra tiene el suficiente peso por sí misma como para no necesitar de nombres conocidos en el reparto», explicaba Julia Gómez Cora, responsable de contenidos de CIE.

A pesar de su juventud, a Luis Amando le conocen perfectamente los aficionados al musical, porque desde hace diez años ha pasado por los repartos de buena parte de los títulos presentados en Madrid, desde «Los miserables» a «El hombre de La Mancha». Sustituyó a Raphael en «Jekyll y Hyde» y en México protagonizó «Jesucristo Superstar» en una producción dirigida por el «furero» Hansel Cereza. Su pareja escénica es Felicidad Farag, una joven granadina que proviene del mundo de la zarzuela y que con Christine se estrena en el género musical. El tercer vértice del triángulo protagonista es Armando Pita, que también ha participado en diversos montajes musicales, entre ellos «My fair lady».

Además de Kristin Blodgett y Arthur Masella, la coreógrafa Denny Berry ha venido a Madrid para recrear el trabajo original de Gyllian Lynne y, de paso, aprovechar las cualidades como bailarín de Armando Pita, que tiene sus propios pasos en la escena del baile de máscaras. Moira Chapman, que montó «La bella y la bestia», será la directora residente, y Pablo Eisele es el director musical de la función. El dramaturgo -y ex subdirector general de Teatro del Ministerio de Cultura- Eduardo Galán ha sido el encargado de realizar la versión española de la obra.

Basada en la novela de Gastón Leroux, «El fantasma de la ópera» narra la historia de un hombre deforme, que se esconde en los sótanos de la Ópera de París y que tiene aterrorizados con sus crímenes a los responsables del coliseo. El fantasma encuentra en Christine Daaé, una joven integrante del cuerpo de baile, su musa; la enseña a cantar, la convierte en la protagonista de su ópera y se enamora de ella, en lo que resulta un amor imposible por la presencia de Raúl, un noble amigo de la infancia de Christine.

La Ópera de París es el escenario donde se desarrollan las historias de amor y las intrigas de este musical. A Lloyd Webber le costó encontrar el libretista y el letrista adecuados. Finalmente, fueron Charles Hart y Richard Stilgoe los elegidos. El compositor contaba entonces que «quería escribir una gran partitura romántica, algo en la línea de Rodgers y Hammerstein. Y la historia del fantasma tenía todos los ingredientes para convertirse en una gran historia de amor trágica y operística. El argumento pedía grandes melodías y, después de haber realizado distintos experimentos, sentía que era el momento de afrontar una obra así, en la que me sentía muy cómodo».

El reparto original de «El fantasma de la ópera» incluyó a Sarah Brightman. La cantante se había casado con el compositor dos años antes, después de una relación que llenó muchas páginas en la prensa sensacionalista británica y que era comidilla inevitable en el mundo teatral inglés. Para varios de los biógrafos del músico, con el papel de Christine Lloyd Webber quiso escribirle una apasionada carta de amor a Sarah Brightman.

El principal compañero de aventuras de Lloyd Webber fue el productor Cameron Macintosh, con quien ya había trabajado en «Cats». «Será teatral y técnicamente emocionante», decía de la obra. No se escatimaron esfuerzos, y la producción costó más de dos millones de libras esterlinas, una cifra extraordinariamente elevada para lo que se acostumbraba entonces.

Una de las grandes bazas de «El fantasma de la ópera» es su aparatosa escenografía. Maria Björnson, habitual en el Covent Garden, fue la encargada de recrear los entresijos de la Ópera de París. Contó con casi la mitad del presupuesto de la producción, y el resultado es verdaderamente espectacular. La acción discurre por los sótanos, el escenario, los salones, los palcos, y Maria Björnson aprovecha todos y cada uno de los centímetros del escenario. Uno de los elementos de la escenografía, incluso, tiene su propia escena: una gigantesca lámpara situada sobre los espectadores se convierte en uno de los aliados del Fantasma para atemorizar.

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## II. Críticas: *El rey león*

### 17. “Cub Comes of Age: A Twice-Told Cosmic Tale”

Ben Brantley, The New York Times

*November 14, 1997*

Suddenly, you're 4 years old again, and you've been taken to the circus for the first time. You can only marvel at the exotic procession of animals before you: the giraffes and the elephants and the hippopotamuses and all those birds in balletic flight. Moreover, these are not the weary-looking beasts in plumes and spangles that usually plod their way through urban circuses but what might be described as their Platonic equivalents, creatures of air and light and even a touch of divinity.

Where are you, really, anyway? The location is supposed to be a theater on 42d Street, a thoroughfare that has never been thought of as a gateway to Eden. Yet somehow you have fallen into what appears to be a primal paradise. And even the exquisitely restored New Amsterdam Theater, a former Ziegfeld palace, disappears before the spectacle within it.

Such is the transporting magic wrought by the opening 10 minutes of "The Lion King," the director Julie Taymor's staged version of the Midas-touch cartoon movie that has generated millions for the Walt Disney Company. And the ways in which Ms. Taymor translates the film's opening musical number, "Circle of Life," where an animal kingdom of the African plains gathers to pay homage to its leonine ruler and his newly born heir, is filled with astonishment and promise.

For one thing, it is immediately clear that this production, which opened last night, is not going to follow the path pursued by Disney's first Broadway venture, "Beauty and the Beast," a literal-minded exercise in turning its cinematic model into three dimensions. Ms. Taymor, a maverick artist known for her bold multicultural experiments with puppetry and ritualized theater, has her own distinctive vision, one that is miles away from standard Disney fare.

And while this "Lion King" holds fast to much of the film's basic plot and dialogue (the book is by Roger Allers and Irene Mecchi), Ms. Taymor has abandoned none of the singular, and often haunting, visual flourishes she brought to such surreal works as "Juan Darien," which was revived at Lincoln Center last season, and "The Green Bird."

There has been much jokey speculation about the artistic marriage of the corporate giant and the bohemian iconoclast, which has been discussed as though Donald Trump and Karen Finley had decided to set up housekeeping. But that rich first number, in which those life-size animal figures assume a transcendent, pulsing existence, seems to suggest that these strange bedfellows might indeed live in blissful harmony.

Unfortunately, it turns out that these glorious opening moments are only the honeymoon part of this fable of the coming of age of a lion with a father fixation. Throughout the show's 2 hours and 40 minutes (as against the 75-minute movie),

there will be plenty of instances of breathtaking beauty and scenic ingenuity, realized through techniques ranging from shadow puppetry to Bunraku. Certainly, nowhere before on Broadway has a stampede of wildebeests or a herd of veldt-skimming gazelles been rendered with such eye-popping conviction.

But in many ways, Ms. Taymor's vision, which is largely rooted in ritual forms of theater from Asia and Africa, collides with that of Disney, where visual spectacle is harnessed in the service of heartwarming storytelling. There were hopes that the Disney-Taymor collaboration might reflect what Katharine Hepburn reportedly said about Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers: "He gives her class, and she gives him sex" (if you think of Ms. Taymor as Astaire and you substitute sentiment for sex).

But Ms. Taymor's strengths have never been in strongly sustained narratives or fully developed characters. It is the cosmic picture that she's after, a sense of the cycles of life and death, of rebirth and metamorphosis. Accordingly, many of the strongest scenes in this "Lion King" are edged in mortal darkness, including a lovely vignette in which lionesses stalk their prey.

Since the movie version had a fashionably eco-friendly aspect, with pointed reference to the delicate balance of nature, Ms. Taymor's animistic viewpoint is not entirely out of place here. But although many of the actors have charm and freshness, they are hampered to some extent by the masks and puppet effigies that turn them into animals. You will gasp again and again at the inventive visual majesty of this show, realized through the masks and puppets of Ms. Taymor and Michael Curry, scenic design by Richard Hudson, and Donald Holder's wonderful elemental lighting. But you may be harder pressed to muster the feelings of suspense and poignancy that the film, for all its preachiness, really did evoke.

If you have young children, you probably know the plot. The lion cub Simba (Scott Irby-Ranniar), the heir to the throne of his heroic father, Mufasa (Samuel E. Wright), becomes the pawn of his father's evil brother and archrival, Scar (John Vickery). When Scar murders Mufasa, he convinces the vulnerable cub that it is he who is responsible for the death. And Simba, in the tradition of young fairy tale heroes, goes into exile in a forest, where he finally comes to terms with his inner self and is ready to reclaim the throne.

The words and the jokes here are familiar from the movie. So are many of the mostly unexceptional songs, with music and lyrics by Elton John and Tim Rice, although this production includes additional music and lyrics (by Lebo M, Mark Mancina, Jay Rifkin, Hans Zimmer and Ms. Taymor) that incorporate a more authentic sense of tribal rhythms and call-and-response choruses.

There's an irresistible pull to this music, and when the performers take to the aisles, their puppet appendages in tow, the show takes on a celebratory carnival feeling that almost matches its opening. It's when "The Lion King" decides to fulfill its obligations as a traditional Broadway book musical that it goes slack.

Garth Fagan's choreography is, for the most part, on the clumsy side. A romantic ballet in which the grown Simba (Jason Raize) and his lioness girlfriend (Heather Headley) discover their attraction while other pairs of lovers float in the air above

them still seems like a concept waiting to be worked out. And the rendering of the show's best-known number, "Hakuna Matata," a paean to the easy life, surprisingly lacks effervescence.

The vaudeville-ish comedy from the movie has been imported more or less intact, and, on its own grade-school terms, it's still pretty funny. As Simba's pals Timon the meerkat and Pumbaa the wart hog, Max Casella and Tom Alan Robbins are a winning burlesque team. Mr. Casella and Geoff Hoyle, who plays an officious hornbill named Zazu, manipulate puppets that are attached to their bodies and yet somehow manage to make both parts of their divided selves into one character.

As the sinister Scar, in a part spoken to perfection by Jeremy Irons in the movie, Mr. Vickery is too campy to be very menacing, and he isn't helped by his silly costume, which looks more armadillo than lion. Tracy Nicole Chapman, Stanley Wayne Mathis and Kevin Cahoon, who play a trio of scavenging hyenas, are actually more satisfactory villains. And Tsidii Le Loka as Rafiki, the shaman baboon, is a delightful force of gibbering energy.

Mr. Wright, Mr. Raize and Ms. Headley are all attractive performers with melodious voices. But only Mr. Irby-Ranniar, in a most convincing portrait of impetuous, conflicted youth, strikes a spontaneous human chord that invites emotional engagement.

Still, "The Lion King" remains an important work in a way that "Beauty and the Beast" simply is not. Ms. Taymor has introduced a whole new vocabulary of images to the Broadway blockbuster, and you're unlikely to forget such sights as the face of Simba's dead father forming itself into an astral mask among the stars.

There will inevitably be longueurs for both adults and children who attend this show. But it offers a refreshing and more sophisticated alternative to the standard panoply of special effects that dominate most tourist-oriented shows today. Seen purely as a visual tapestry, there is simply nothing else like it.

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### **18. "The Lion King (New Amsterdam Theater)"**

Greg Evans, *Variety*  
*November 13, 1997*

A new generation of cats just took over Broadway. Simply said, Julie Taymor's staging of Disney's "The Lion King" is a marvel, a theatrical achievement unrivaled in its beauty, brains and ingenuity.

Leaping far beyond its celluloid inspiration, the stage version improves upon nearly every aspect of the hit 1994 animated film, from visual artistry and storytelling to Lebo M's score and the newly African-ized pop songs of Elton John and Tim Rice. With this production, the Walt Disney Co. stages itself as a serious and ambitious contender on the legit scene, all but demanding that its first theatrical foray, 1994's too-literally adapted "Beauty and the Beast," was little more than a warm-up.

And “The Lion King” is a victory for Taymor as well (or perhaps above all). A MacArthur Foundation “genius,” Taymor has long been known in New York theater circles for her eye-popping puppetry and visual effects, yet her previous work, including last season’s “Juan Darien,” seemed more than a bit taken with its own cerebral heft. No such chilliness here: Playful and warm, funny and exciting, “The Lion King” will enchant children and adults in equal measure. Disney and Broadway have found a box office bonanza that in every likelihood will run for years.

Employing her trademark mix of various puppet, mask and costume techniques, Taymor presents a “Lion King” that is true to the look of Disney’s animation while incorporating a stronger African design, somehow blending her influences into a style that is uniquely her own (in addition to directing, she designed the costumes and shares a credit with Michael Curry on the masks and puppets). Richard Hudson’s exquisitely streamlined sets and Donald Holder’s deep, rich lighting contribute to a production that wears every penny of its \$15 million-plus cost. And wears it well.

The first seconds of the show are as simple as they are stirring. Against a midnight-blue sky, Rafiki (Tsidii Le Loka), the baboon (here presented as more shaman than simian, and, unlike the movie, made female), begins a call-and-response African chant song with singers perched high up in the New Amsterdam Theater’s opera seats. As the nighttime backdrop gives way to a brilliant orange morning and the chant segues into the hit “Circle of Life,” the show begins in earnest with a stunning coup de theatre: Two parades (one in either aisle) of giraffes, leopards, antelope, rhinos, elephants and other jungle creatures march from the back of the auditorium to the stage, an entrance that is unquestionably the most pulse-quickening on Broadway in years.

As it will later do with “Can You Feel the Love Tonight,” the show transforms “Circle of Life” from the treacly single version recorded by Elton John into a sweeping choral number that, like much else to come, recalls the lush harmonies and complex percussion of South Africa’s Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Additional music was penned by Lebo M, Mark Mancina, Jay Rifkin, Taymor and Hans Zimmer, and while the exact degree of collaboration (particularly among John, Rice and South African composer Lebo M) most likely will stay a Disney secret, audiences won’t care a whit — the score is a seamless meld of pop and authentic-sounding African music, not only accessible but worthy of repeated listening (a cast CD, in stores now, guarantees Disney of another cash stream).

But it isn’t just the music that opens “Lion King” with a roar. The animal creations that amble through the audience are nothing less than works of art, impressionistic and utterly graceful. Some are puppets — a wooden, Bunraku-style leopard, leaping antelope — while others are costumes — men on stilts for the giraffes, a huge elephant with a man in each leg. As often as not, the boundaries between costume, puppetry and mask are blurred, if not obliterated, in inventions that draw audible gasps from the audience.

Characters more cartoony, though just as impressive, will come as the story follows the familiar outline of the movie. Mufasa (Samuel E. Wright), the Lion King, and his queen Sarabi (Gina Breedlove) present newborn cub and future king Simba to jungle society, much to the consternation of Mufasa’s evil brother Scar (John Vickery), who



wants the crown for himself. Enlisting the aid of the sniveling, much-despised hyenas, Scar, by intermission, will have murdered the king, banished little Simba and taken over the pride with despotic ruthlessness.

You don't have to be a Disney fanatic to know that Simba will return, wiser and stronger, to take his rightful place, nor to see that Taymor, along with book writers Roger Allers and Irene Mecchi, has very effectively fleshed out the 75-minute film plot with character development (seriously) and more than a little Shakespearean intrigue (the show manages to make unstated references to Hamlet and Prince Hal without seeming heavy-handed).

Nor is Disney lost in the mix. Fully on display is the studio's traditional panoply of comic relief characters (the vaudeville pairing of wiseguy meerkat Timon and lumbering warthog Pumbaa), spunky love interests (lioness cub Nala) and scary villains (Scar and his troops of Fascist hyenas). Disney's cartoons have never shied away from the horrific, and the stage show is no different, with the stampeding death of Mufasa all the more powerful since the father-son relationship has been so better established than in the movie.

The wildebeest stampede is one of various set pieces (a waterfall, Mufasa's face wondrously forming in the night sky, among many others) that will have audiences buzzing — and the stage trickery used in their creation won't be spoiled here. Anyway, it's the endless stream of lovely, smaller touches — a smattering of fireflies, a blue silk lake that evaporates into the stage during a drought — that prevent "Lion King" from lurching scene to scene, big moment to big moment.

Finally, what should not be overshadowed by the stunning physical production and terrific score is an ensemble that ranks with the best currently on Broadway. With a mask that variously sits atop his head and moves over his face, Vickery is a wickedly funny Scar, not quite as effete as his movie counterpart but no less savage. Wright, as the proud, loving Mufasa, couldn't be better, and South African vocalist Loka, as the spiritual baboon, is a show-stopper. Max Casella, best known as the smart aleck Vinnie on TV's "Doogie Howser, M.D.," makes an attention-grabbing Broadway bow as the wisecracking meerkat Timon, easily matching the fondly remembered celluloid incarnation by Nathan Lane. Casella, costumed and painted entirely green as he skillfully operates the meerkat puppet, exemplifies a production design that invites the audience to watch both the actors and the creatures they manipulate.

At the center of the story is the cub himself, and Taymor is fortunate to have found two young actors who are up to the roar. Scott Irby-Ranniar plays the first act's young Simba, dancing and singing with the precocious affability of Jackson 5-vintage Michael Jackson. Jason Raize takes over as the teenage Simba, athletic, cocky and strong-voiced. Both actors are well-served by Garth Fagan's delightful choreography.

Is "The Lion King" perfect? Of course not. A second-act ballet, featuring dancers suspended in mid-air, is unintentionally campy, and, surprisingly, one of the film's more popular songs, "Hakuna Matata," seems a bit rushed. Perhaps a few minutes could be trimmed here and there, but only a jackal would whine about such things. "The Lion King" is a show that will introduce a new generation of children to the theater, and doesn't sacrifice a drop of intelligence, integrity or sophistication to do it.

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### 19. “Lion King is king of the hill”

Jess Cagle , Entertainment Weekly

*December 5, 1997*

Like Christmas Day and sex with supermodels, Broadway seasons are often far more exciting during the anticipation stage. Over the past two months, four new eagerly anticipated musicals have opened, and the first three — The Scarlet Pimpernel, Triumph of Love, and Side Show — made this season look like no exception to the rule. But then, on Nov. 13, The Lion King bounded onto the stage, and Broadway roared.

Based on Disney’s blockbuster 1994 animated feature, the musical version of The Lion King might have been mounted like the spectacular but ice-showish Beauty and the Beast, which is still charming children and making money a few blocks away. Fortunately, Disney didn’t leave well enough alone. To bring The Lion King into three dimensions, Disney tapped Julie Taymor, an experimental director known for her cerebral productions meshing puppetry and poetry. The unlikely partnership has turned the most successful animated film in Disney’s history into the most exciting Broadway experience since Rent routed the Great White Way into the ’90s two seasons ago.

Elton John and Tim Rice have added three songs to their original score (more music, including some haunting African tribal numbers, is by Taymor, Hans Zimmer, Mark Mancina, Lebo M, and Jay Rifkin), but it’s Taymor’s staging that makes The Lion King such a blessed event. Her enormous creations — including a life-size elephant and great, lanky giraffes — roam the theater in a full-throttle rendition of “Circle of Life.” Fusing actors, costumes, and puppets, Taymor and her collaborator, Michael Curry, leave the faces of her largely black cast visible under the regal lion masks, giving the proceedings an unexpected emotional wallop. There’s an inspired performance by Tsidii Le Loka as the babbling, mystical, mischievous baboon, to whom Taymor has given a sex change (Robert Guillaume did the voice in the film). And Max Casella (whose Doogie Howser, M.D. costar Neil Patrick Harris, by the way, is starring in the Los Angeles production of Rent) sings, dances, and clowns impressively while operating a Timon-the-meerkat puppet almost as big as he is.

Yes, The Lion King’s pacing drags a bit in the first act, and the show’s venue, Disney’s opulently refurbished New Amsterdam Theatre on 42nd Street, has a few kinks (you’ll miss a lot of the show if you’re seated too far to the side). But Taymor’s amazing vision overrides any quibbles. The Lion King can make you fall in love with theater no matter what theater it’s in.

Since so many people are lining up for The Lion King, here’s an assessment of the season’s easier-to-get-into new musicals. There’s only one good reason to see The Scarlet Pimpernel: Douglas Sills as Percy, the titular English aristocrat who leads a secret brigade against radical French revolutionaries. He prances and swaggers with sharp comic timing and a dancer’s grace. He sings in a heroic baritone that could sail the English Channel. Too bad the show’s sappy ballads by Nan Knighton and Frank Wildhorn sound like an unholy collaboration between Celine Dion and Andrew Lloyd

Webber. Director Peter Hunt's lavish but static adaptation of the century-old novel by Baroness Orczy is even more lazy. If the fighting French are your thing, *Les Misérables* is still the place to be.

Likewise, *Triumph of Love*, directed by Michael Mayer, triumphs only when Betty Buckley — right now the finest voice on Broadway — gets to sing. Despite the commanding presence of costar F. Murray Abraham, this musical version of Marivaux's gender-bending 1732 comedy about the sexual awakening of a group of philosophers is pretty dumb.

If Marivaux sounds like an odd inspiration for a musical, you haven't seen *Side Show*, based on Daisy and Violet Hilton, the Siamese twins who in real life picked themselves up from the carnival circuit to become vaudeville stars. As the twins, Emily Skinner and Alice Ripley sing poignantly and beautifully, and director Robert Longbottom's well-meaning, straight-faced storytelling works on its own loopy terms. (By the end, you cringe when a movie director refers to them as freaks.) Still, this musical gave me church giggles a couple of times; for all its ambition and pretensions, it's inevitably a show starring two fine actresses with their butts stuck together. Perhaps they should have used puppets.

The Lion King: A+

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## 20. "The Lion King"

John Simon, *New York Magazine*  
*November 15, 1997*

Come to *The Lion King* with two pairs of eyes, one ear, and half a brain. You will be bombarded by some of the most beautiful and spectacular sights theater can offer from before and behind, so eyes in the back of the head will come in handy. You will be harangued by second-rate standard-show music and lyrics by Elton John and Tim Rice, and also by Lebo M's stirring African chants and ululations, to which your active ear should be cocked. Finally, you will be subjected to a well-worn, simplistic children's tale about a lion cub's hard road to adulthood and the throne of the animal kingdom, usurped by his wicked uncle in cahoots with some murderously laughing hyenas. Kiddies, of course, will delightedly swallow it whole, unless they are tiny and flappable. But this is the one such show adults will feast on, too, mostly because of the wonders wrought by Julie Taymor, who designed and directed this cornucopia of dazzlements. First, the animals, large and small, re-created with unparalleled imagination, underpinned by costumes that artfully blend realism with fantasy: The prancing giraffes and leaping antelopes, the nodding elephant and barreling warthog, keep you marveling even during the story's stodgiest galumphing

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## 21. "The Lion King"

Michael Billington, *The Guardian*  
*October 21, 1999*

After all the hype, just how good is the *Lion King* which finally opened last night at the Lyceum Theatre in London? Impressive certainly. But its diverse visual brilliance

is often betrayed by its Disneyfied verbal banality. To suggest, as one commentator recently did, that it is on a creative par with Hamlet is to show an insane lack of proportion.

You can see why mention of Hamlet has cropped up in that the young cub, Simba, is robbed of his throne and deprived of his father by his murderous uncle, Scar. But the book by Roger Allers and Irene Mecchi lacks Shakespeare's mythic potency. For a start Scar is camp as Chloe rather than a guilt-haunted usurper. Also Simba, rather than wrestling with the agonies of revenge, spends his exiled adolescence as a lotus-eater in the company of a farting wart-hog and a meerkat before finally, at his father's bidding, defeating evil and assuming his throne.

What is curious about the show is that it borrows from so many different traditions. Musically, it pays homage to Africa in its grassland chants and ensemble numbers such as Shadowland and Endless Night. But the bulk of the songs by Elton John and Tim Rice belong to the western tradition with its note of aching romantic yearning. Verbally, the show is totally American with its politically correct ecological references and its treatment of Timon the meerkat as a Catskills comic full of lines like: "Haven't you got your lions crossed?"

The show's undoubted appeal lies in Richard Hudson's scenic design and the masks and puppetry of Julie Taymor and Michael Curry. Taymor, as director, is the organising visual spirit behind the show and she produces a child's garden of delights. But even here one notices how much she borrows from the international theatrical language. When the lions demonstrate grief over the death of their king, Mufasa, by producing ribbons of white silk from their eyes, the effect is pure Peter Brook. Taymor has shopped around shrewdly; but, as with the music, what we have is an artful synthesis of international styles rather than something African.

The show is a skilful commercial artefact; and there are impressive performances from Cornell John as a dignified Mufasa, Luke Youngblood as a fearless young Simba and Gregory Gudgeon as a chattering toucan even if Rob Edwards goes way over the top of Pride Rock as an epicene Scar. Children, I suspect, will love it. But to suggest that the Lion King advances the art of the musical or achieves a Shakespearean complexity is to surrender to preposterous fantasy.

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## **22. "The Lion King: a feast for the eyes, if little else"**

Michael Billington, *The Guardian*

*January 4, 2011*

I may not be the ideal person to explain the enduring appeal of *The Lion King*. When I saw it in 1999, I was struck by the thinness of its plot, the cursoriness of its characterisation and the blandness of the Elton John/Tim Rice musical numbers. But even I had to admit to the kaleidoscopic visual brilliance of Julie Taymor's production; and in that, I suspect, lies the ultimate source of the show's success.

Taymor, now wrestling with Broadway's *Spider-Man*, was an experimental director hired by Disney to create a blockbuster. And what she did, with great skill, was to

deploy an international theatrical language. Out of Africa came the idea of lion masks perched above the actors' heads. From the Japanese bunraku tradition came visibly manipulated puppets. And when mass grief was symbolised by ribbons of white silk issuing from leonine eyes, I was reminded of Peter Brook, the influential English director. The show was, and is, a shrewd synthesis of global avant garde techniques; and, even if nothing matched the opening parade of antelopes, elephants and zebras down the Lyceum aisle, it provided a feast for the eyes.

There are other objective reasons for the show's success. It appeals to children, it is based on a familiar Disney cartoon, it transcends language in a way that makes it easily recommendable, like *Cats*, to anxious phrasebook-clutching tourists. I'm less convinced by the argument that the story has some profound mythic resonance. Admittedly it deals with a young cub robbed of his throne by a murderous uncle: a fact which led Peter Conrad to make the incredible claim that the musical was not merely based on *Hamlet* but actually superior to it.

But I don't believe it's the archetypal narrative structure that is the secret of the show's success. In the end, the eyes have it.

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### **23. "How The Lion King became the most successful stage show of all time"**

David Gritten, *The Telegraph*  
*October 17, 2014*

The *Lion King* celebrates its 15th anniversary at London's Lyceum Theatre with a flurry of remarkable statistics swirling around it. This is the highest-grossing stage show in history, having already grossed some £3.8 billion globally – more than the previous record-holder *Phantom of the Opera*. Or, to place it in a broader context, more than the combined global revenues of the six most popular *Harry Potter* films.

But does *The Lion King* still speak to our times? Has it retained its power and visual majesty over the years, or is it now more of an obligatory staging post for foreign tourists to London?

At the weekend I took my seat feeling faintly unnerved by another statistic: since its opening at the Lyceum in 1999, 12 million people, no less, have done precisely the same thing.

I was keeping my expectations in check. Musicals do not always date well. I looked in on *Phantom of the Opera* a second time for professional reasons in 2004, when the ill-judged film version was released. It was 18 years after its original London opening, and a dispiriting evening; it felt clapped out and past its sell-by date.

I also wondered if anything could replicate the sheer sense of slack-jawed awe at seeing the astonishing opening of *The Lion King* for the first time. Set to percussive African rhythms, it features gigantic elephants tramping down the aisles, joining other animals on stage. These inventively designed creatures are propelled by actors: on stilts as giraffes, astride a bicycle device from which antelopes prance gracefully, holding long bendy poles with high-flying birds on their end.

The huge shimmering saffron sun rises over an unmistakably African plain, and Pride Rock, from where the lions survey their kingdom, rises like a corkscrew from beneath the stage. The scene has remarkable visceral power. It's rooted in the collective nature of the experience; all around you, everyone else is gaping and holding their breath too.

Well, 15 years on, it still works brilliantly - as does the ensemble opening of the second act: One by One is sung by the ensemble cast with extraordinary drumming, which catapults the audience once more out of their surroundings.

It's easy to overlook, what with all the trumpeting of huge grosses and audience figures, what a radical piece of theatre The Lion King is, and always was.

Credit for this goes to the prime mover of this stage version, director Julie Taymor, who came from avant-garde, ritual and experimental theatre, and had already used masks and puppetry in other productions. Taymor also helped design the costumes for the Lion King, and even wrote the lyrics for one of its songs, Endless Night.

She has created a world that is fiercely non-literal, often to moving and wondrous effect. She makes no attempt to disguise the fact that these animals are moved and performed by humans. A drought on the African plain is conveyed by a circle of blue silk gradually vanishing by being pulled through a hole in the stage. When a lioness weeps, she pulls lengths of white ribbon from her eyes. Taymor evokes a waterfall using a huge sheet of billowing silk. A score of actors stride on stage, boxes on their head with long grass sprouting from them; this is Taymor's way of representing the African savannah.

All of which seems a long way from the animated film and video of The Lion King, which proved immensely successful for Disney in the 1990s. They're agreeable entertainments, based on a hero-myth story redolent of Hamlet. As a young lion cub, Simba is hoodwinked by his malevolent uncle Scar into believing he was responsible for his father the king Mufasa's death. Simba flees before returning as an adult to reclaim his birthright from Scar, who has installed himself as king.

This is all fine as far as it goes, yet there's a cosiness and reassurance about the film that Taymor withholds; in the stage version there is simply more at stake, along with a recognition that life is fragile. She also gave far greater emphasis to the film's female characters. There's a tough-mindedness about her method of story-telling; it's surprising that Disney, to its great credit, approved such a radical reboot of the film.

But it works superbly. The performances in the London production are outstanding, starting with Brown Lindiwe Mkhize as the extraordinary shaman-mandrill, Rafiki, a glowering, wildly strange presence with a singing voice that can shake the Lyceum's foundations.

Shaun Escoffery and George Asprey both excel as, respectively, a kind-but-stern Mufasa and a slightly camp, Bill Nighy-esque Scar. There's an amusing piece of stagecraft when the darting boy Simba (Ezrae Maye) leaps offstage and is immediately replaced by his muscular adult self (Jonathan Andrew Hume).

A comic element is supplied by a double act, John Hassler as Timon the meerkat and Keith Bookman as Pumbaa, a flatulent warthog, both of whom befriend and advise the young Simba. Delightfully, Frame adopts the persona of a Jewish-American stand-up comic, sardonically commenting on the action.

Second only to Taymor's vision, meanwhile, is the music of South African composer Lebo M, which makes the crucial difference between The Lion King's film and stage versions. He has augmented the serviceable original pop songs of Elton John and Tim Rice, creating new ones and rooting them in a distinctly African tradition.

If this musical has a predominant sound, it is his - rhythmic, melodic and thuddingly percussive, as underlined by the presence of two energetic drummers, visibly up high on either side of the stage. Yet his choral arrangements, some sung in Zulu, are simply heart-stopping.

At this point, such John-Rice songs as Can You Feel The Love Tonight and Circle of Life might easily feel tired and over-familiar - yet they fit neatly enough into the vastly extended musical framework that Lebo M has provided.

There are minor irritations in the evening. At one point, Mufasa memorably tells the young Simba about the natural order of life on the African plain: "Everything you see exists together in a delicate balance." One wishes the production adhered rigorously to that sentiment. Instead, for laughs, we get an Ikea gag, and Timon and Pumbaa do a brief Riverdance knees-up. There's even a bitchy line about "that cartoon," meaning the Lion King film.

Light relief it may be, and one understands the need to provide filler material between scene changes, but it serves to interrupt the connection to the otherworld Taymor so assiduously created. It's as though someone doubted the capacity of Taymor's brilliant vision to hold the audience's attention throughout the evening.

Yet it's not enough to detract from the overall triumph. We suspend disbelief when confronted with this version of Africa, and a story of eternal truths that makes specific period irrelevant. Ingeniously, The Lion King is brought to life in a space that is impervious to trends and fashion.

It will not date easily; indeed, one can imagine it still packing out the Lyceum 15 years from now.

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#### **24. "Lo mejor y lo peor de 'El Rey León, el musical'"**

David Bernal, Cinemanía (El Mundo)

*21 de Octubre de 2011*

No basta con tener una película con canciones excelentes para fabricar un musical de éxito. Disney lo intentó con La Sirenita y Tarzán, dos cimas que abrieron y cerraron la Segunda Edad Dorada de la compañía, pero su paso por Broadway fue tan anecdótico como fugaz. El Rey León, sin embargo, se ha convertido en un fenómeno de masas mundial que ha conmovido a cincuenta millones de personas en trece países (actualmente se representa en seis). El mérito es, sobre todo, de la propuesta

escénica de Julie Taymor. En lugar de optar por una ilustración literal del filme de 1994 hecha con peluches (o peor: una nueva versión de *Cats*), la reputada directora de cine, ópera y teatro ha conseguido acercar la cultura africana (y los orígenes mismos del teatro) al gran público con un original montaje que aglutina, sin caer en el pastiche, máscaras africanas, marionetas, técnicas japonesas -del kabuki y el bunraku del siglo XVII- o el teatro de sombras balinés. El resultado es una experiencia teatral (ha costado diez millones de euros) que dinamita las fronteras entre alta y baja cultura.

CINEMANIA asistió al preestreno para hacer una serie de reflexiones que sirvan como guía para ver un musical que no te puedes perder si tu infancia también estuvo marcada por la muerte de Mufasa.

1. Duda despejada: está a la altura. Del mismo modo que un Big Mac sabe igual en Rusia o Australia, los musicales made in Broadway, al tratarse de franquicias, son iguales en cualquier parte del mundo. Con *El Rey León* sin embargo había cierto escepticismo porque se trata de un montaje con unas necesidades muy especiales, ya que al mezclar el folklora africano con la música pop gran parte del elenco debe ser afroamericano. La solución ha sido importar gran parte del equipo artístico (compuesto por 53 actores y 21 músicos). También se han reciclado los elementos escénicos del montaje parisino y se han hecho algunas reformas en el teatro Lope de Vega. De este modo la producción española es exactamente igual que la de Broadway o el West End.

2. Sentirás la llamada de África. Cuando el musical se estrenó en Nueva York en 1997 un crítico dijo que tenía “los mejores primeros quince minutos de la Historia de Broadway”. Y razón no le faltaba, porque la apertura –con un desfile de animales al son del tema *El ciclo de la vida*– pone los pelos de punta y te sumerge de lleno en la sabana africana. Gran parte del mérito es de los guturales cantos del chamán Rafiki, interpretado por la artista sudafricana Brenda Mhlongo, que anteriormente hizo lo propio en las producciones de Hong Kong, Alemania o Broadway. Su energía inunda el teatro Lope de Vega del espíritu de África. A partir de aquí todo va ligeramente cuesta abajo con una segunda parte más floja.

3. La obra cumbre de Julie Taymor. Pese a ser una de las directoras de ópera, cine y teatro más prestigiosas del mundo, pasará a la Historia por su montaje de *El Rey León*. En él pudo recoger todo lo aprendido en los cuatro años que vivió en Indonesia cuando era joven o en la Escuela de Mimos de Jacques Lecoq en París. En cine ha tenido una carrera marcada por la irregularidad que empezó con *Titus*, aquí estrenada con dos años de retraso, siguió con el biopic de *Frida*, su mayor éxito, y continuó con *Across the Universe*, musical con canciones de los Beatles que fue un fiasco. Su reciente versión cinematográfica *La tempestad* permanece inédita por estos lares y hace poco fue despedida del catastrófico (y carísimo) montaje del musical de *Spider-man* con música de Bono y The Edge.

4. Un musical interactivo. Uno de los grandes atractivos del montaje es su carácter conceptual. Taymor aplicó la ley del menos es más a una escenografía de acento minimalista que el espectador debe completar con su imaginación. El decorado es un fondo en blanco –iluminado según la sensación que se quiera transmitir– y los animales son marionetas de las que solo vemos el armazón. Uno de sus elementos



clave es el llamado “doble acontecimiento”, que consiste en colocar una máscara sobre el cráneo del actor para que el espectador decida si quiere mirar al hombre o al animal. Esto, que es todo un acierto, puede sacar de la historia a espectadores que no tengan mucha predisposición o cierto bagaje previo.

5. No podrás cantar las canciones. No solo por respeto al resto de espectadores, sino porque dentro de la nueva traducción que ha hecho el barcelonés Jordi Galcerán también se incluyen todas esas canciones que marcaron nuestra infancia y son todo un icono cultural. Así, El ciclo de la vida pasa a ser El ciclo vital y Preparaos se titula ahora Conspirar. El musical, por cierto, incluye tres nuevas canciones de Elton John y Tim Rice, como la sobrecogedora Están en ti, que fueron recogidas en un disco con arreglos de Lebo M, Rhythm of the Pride Lands, que fue publicado en 1995. El Hakuna Matata, por suerte, se queda igual.

6. Guiños locales: ¿Eran necesarios? Pese a que prácticamente no se ha cambiado una coma del montaje original, se han introducido algunos guiños de carácter local con el fin de hacer más cercano el humor y algunos personajes. Esto le imprime un innecesario toque casposo que sin embargo es celebrado por una parte del público con carcajadas. Que el pájaro Zazu se arranque por Joselito, el Pequeño Ruiseñor, o cante El Chiringuito de Georgie Dann como forma de torturar a Scar, puede tener su gracia, pero el deje andaluz de Timón tiene los mismos efectos que tendría meter a uno de los Morancos en un montaje shakesperiano. Ozú, ¡qué coraje!

7. Scar es un gran villano. Cuenta el animador Andreas Deja que cuando Oprah visitó su despacho y vio una escultura de Scar le preguntó si era gay. Una posibilidad que aquí se confirma con la interpretación de Sergi Albert, que compone un Scar amanerado, maquiavélico y carismático que sigue la tradición de los grandes malos de Disney. El actor no es nuevo en la destilación de la maldad ya que hizo de Gastón en La bella y la bestia y de Herodes en Jesucristo Superstar. Cada vez que aparece en escena hipnotiza al público. Es el gran roba-escenas de la función.

8. Los acentos cantan un poco. En el montaje se dan cita hasta trece nacionalidades. Simba está interpretado por el triunfite mexicano Carlos Rivera; Mufasa es panameño y Nala brasileña. La actriz que interpreta a Rafiki, por ejemplo, no habla español y se sabe el texto fonéticamente. Esto da lugar a una ensalada de acentos que no molesta demasiado y, aunque se irá homogenizando en sucesivas representaciones, enriquecen el rollo multicultural cultural del asunto.

9. Los cachorros lo hacen bien. En España no hay tradición de musicales y, por tanto, tampoco de enseñanzas artísticas en las escuelas, por eso es muy difícil encontrar a niños que sepan actuar, cantar y bailar bien en las producciones que lo requieren. Conscientes de esto, la productora Stage Entertainment hace dos años puso en marcha una escuela de El Rey León en la que formaron a sesenta niños de los que finalmente seleccionaron a diez que se irán turnando para interpretar a Simba y Nala de cachorros. Los que nosotros vimos –David García y Yamileth Cayetano– lo hicieron de maravilla.

10. Es el ciclo de la vida. El musical es una buena forma de ir abriendo boca antes del reestreno de El Rey León 3D el 21 de diciembre y la salida al mercado de la edición Diamante en Blu-ray. Los espectadores que en 1994 quedaron hechizados con la

historia de Simba podrán completar así un ciclo vital que, como el propio filme, termina como empezó.

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## **25. “«El Rey León»: Rey pero no emperador”**

Miguel Ayanz, La Razón

*28 de octubre de 2011*

Precedido de enormes expectativas, por fin rugió en Madrid «El Rey León». Justificadas, en parte: es difícil no emocionarse ante la grandiosa teatralidad impregnada de esencia africana del arranque de este musical: los quince minutos de «El ciclo vital» resumen la aventura iniciática del protagonista y merecen por sí solos estar en la historia del teatro. Julie Taymor capturó, allá por 1997, la esencia del continente negro en una serie de escenas que casi producen eso que llaman «mal de África». Soles candentes elevándose sobre el horizonte, cánticos zulúes, bailes de leonas y una Arcadia de bestias, recreadas imaginativamente con marionetas artesanales –desde cebras, guepardos, impalas y garzas hasta llamativos elefantes y jirafas–, que se postran ante los monarcas, Mufasa y Sarabi, según presentan al heredero, el cachorro Simba. Lo malo de las expectativas, y de un arranque así de contundente, es que es difícil mantener el listón al mismo nivel durante todo el montaje.

### **«Delicatessen» escénicas**

El musical de Julie Taymor es un despliegue de «delicatessen» escénicas fruto de sus años en Asia, con marionetas bunraku, teatro de sombras balinés y máscaras africanas: la estampida de ñus es otro gran momento. Pero la obra, nacida del filme de animación de 1994, es deudor de las virtudes –imaginación y agilidad narrativa– y defectos –es incapaz de escapar a su naturaleza infantil– de la casa Disney. Aunque notables, ni el libreto ni las canciones logran que la historia de Simba y su tío, Scar, que podría haber sido un «Hamlet» a lo Peter Brook, tenga verdadera profundidad.

El reparto hace, en general, un trabajo digno, aunque no redondo. Cantan bien y tienen todos gran presencia. Pero, para una apuesta tan fuerte, ¿no fue posible reunir un grupo más español? Se hacen extraños los acentos del mexicano Carlos Rivera (Simba adulto) y del panameño David Comrie (Mufasa), algo afectados ambos. Igual que Sergi Albert, éste sí español, cuyo Scar resulta barroco, incluso amanerado. La parte femenina sale vencedora: la leona Nala de Daniela Pobega tiene gran fuerza, y el mandril Rafiki de Brenda «Brinzo» Mholongo, aunque de forzado acento, es pura magia. Zazu, Pumbaa y un andalucísimo Timón hacen las delicias del respetable en el apartado cómico gracias al buen hacer de Esteban Oliver, Albert Gracia y David Ávila. Y, por momentos, la alegría y el colorido del cuerpo de actores y bailarines hacen del teatro una fiesta. «El Rey León» será, casi seguro, el rey de la cartelera. Pero no el emperador.

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## 26. “El Rey León tiene un problema (o dos)”

Marcos Ordóñez, El País

5 de noviembre de 2011

El Rey León se anuncia como "el musical que conmueve al mundo". A mí me ha deslumbrado (a ratos), me ha divertido (a ratos), me han gustado las melodías más africanas de su partitura, me ha provocado rendida admiración el enorme empeño del equipo (ese entregadísimo elenco multinacional de intérpretes sudafricanos y latinos que no sólo cantan y bailan sino que realizan un gran trabajo gestual y físico, con máscaras y marionetas bunraku), pero conmoverme, lo que se dice conmoverme, no me ha conmovido. El arranque, tan fastuoso como apabullante, muestra bien a las claras la estrategia de Julie Taymor, demiurga del asunto y, por lo que se ve, amiga de poner todos los huevos en la misma cesta. Se alza un sol como un melocotón gigante y ante los reyes Mufasa y Sarabi (que no pueden evitar tener nombres de mutua médica) desfila una gran parada de animales que vienen a rendir pleitesía al león recién nacido. Imposible contabilizar, delimitar, absorber ese ejército de gacelas, jirafas, cebras y garzas de caña y madera, de tela y papel, que desbordan el escenario del Lope de Vega, y cuando has comenzado a hacerlo, un elefante de tamaño natural hace su entrada por el patio de butacas para pasmo y arrebató general, pero casi no da tiempo de mirar porque ya todos en escena bailan como en trance, y el coro canta *The Cycle of Life*, y no sabes si tu diafragma vibra por la emoción o por el retumbe del altísimo volumen. Predominan tres sensaciones y tampoco sabes por cuál decidirte: a) ensueño lisérgico estilo *Los tres caballeros*; b) sesión de papiroflexia gigante de un universo paralelo, o c) galería con sobredosis de cuadros del aduanero Rousseau. Pongo mi memoria a cámara lenta para tratar de hacer balance. En primer lugar, lo que salta a la vista: decir que máscaras, marionetas, vestuario, iluminación, maquillaje y escenografía son superlativos es quedarse corto, y no cito a todos sus responsables porque esto parecería el listín de Tokio. La banda suena con fuerza y nitidez, pero, de nuevo, ¿podrían bajar un poco ese volumen? Muy eficaces y con chispa las versiones castellanas de libreto y cantables, que firma Jordi Galcerán. (No hace falta señalar que el libreto de Roger Allers e Irene Mecchi es muy flaquito, como los de casi todos los musicales de hoy destinados al consumo familiar: tramas sintéticas, personajes esquemáticos).

Imponente, con carisma y majestad, el Mufasa de David Comrie, y vivaces el joven Simba (David García) y la joven Nala (Aroa Casi Castro). Estupendo (línea reinaza viperina) el Scar de Sergi Albert, que ya brillaba como Sir Galahad en *Spamalot*; y saladísimo el terceto de cómicos: el cála Zazu (Esteban Oliver, muy a lo Gene Wilder), el jabalí petómano Pumbaa (Albert Gracia) y la mangosta Timón (David Ávila, que parece poseído por el espíritu de Pepe da Rosa). El mandril Rakifi corre a cargo de Brenda Brinzo Mholongo, que tiene una gran potencia vocal, pero acerca peligrosamente el personaje al perfil de una hechicera con sobredosis de peyote. Las canciones de Elton John y Tim Rice no me parecen la monda. Me quedo con el mambo *Be Prepared* de Scar y con la resultona *I Just Can't Wait To Be King* del principito Simba, aunque me suenan a descartes de El libro de la selva (la muy popular *Hakuna Matata*, que cierra la primera parte, parece otro descarte, pero cruzado con el lejano *Don't worry, be happy* de Bobby McFerrin). En mi oreja ganan por goleada las composiciones corales (¡y menudos coros!) de Lebo M (*Grasslands Chant*) o el lamento de Rakifi, bañadas por el mismo río donde bebió el *Graceland* de Paul Simon. Entre los highlights de la primera parte rescato también la escena de

padre e hijo en la sabana (que contiene toda la emoción que le falta al exangüe momento de la muerte) y la visita al cementerio de elefantes, con un esqueletazo que ni el de Alien. La estampida de ñus no acaba de provocar el zurriagazo necesario, aunque reconozco que no es el material más fácil de evocar en un escenario.

El Rey León tiene un problema gordo y ese problema sobreviene tras el intermedio. Han sido tantos los prodigios (casi se me olvidaban, por cierto, los preciosos juegos de sombras, a la manera del teatro balinés) que durante la segunda parte tienes la sensación de que ya lo has visto todo: derroche (o desequilibrio) se llama esa figura. Única y poderosa excepción: la impresionante máscara del padre flotando en el cielo nocturno al conjuro de Rakifi. Por otro lado, en el feudo musical mandan las baladas al sirope: juraría que tanto Endless Night como Can You Feel the Love Tonight ya las había oído antes unas doscientas veces en los musicales de la sociedad Webber & Schönberg, no sé si me explico. Hay otro problema dentro del problema, y por partida doble: Carlos Rivera y Daniela Pobega (Simba y Nala adultos), para cuyo casting parecen haber antepuesto las dotes vocales (que son muchas) a la llamémosle flexibilidad actoral. Lo diré de otra forma: no brotan precisamente chispas entre los dos (llámenle feeling, llámenle química, llámenle como quieran) porque Carlos Rivera parece la respuesta mexicana a Victor Mature, y porque alguien no le ha dicho a la brasileña Daniela Pobega que el castellano fonético enfría cualquier papel en ese idioma, por muy felinos que sean sus movimientos, que lo son y desde aquí se celebran. Así las cosas, la parte del león de la segunda parte (como diría Groucho) se la llevan tan guapamente los cómicos (Gracia & Ávila), cosa que también se celebra pero que requeriría un ajuste fino: algo pasa, pongamos por caso, en Mucho ruido para nada cuando apenas recordamos a Beatrice y Benedict y volvemos a casa celebrando las gracias de Dogberry y sus fools por muy bien que lo hayan hecho.

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### III. Críticas: *Rock of Ages*

#### 27. “Songs to Mock and to Love”

Dave Itzkoff, The New York Times

*April 2, 2009*

IF the jukebox musical and the 1980s rock ballad are not direct siblings, they must surely share a common ancestor. Both tend to be bombastic and demand un-self-consciousness from their performers; both attract fans who mask their sincere affection behind a layer of irony. Both are easy punching bags for critics in their respective genres, and nobody is going to argue that Broadway needs more of them.

So that’s a lot of people who might be appalled by the idea of “Rock of Ages,” an unrepentant jukebox musical that opens on Tuesday at the Brooks Atkinson Theater. With a libretto assembled from more than two dozen lighter-waving rock anthems of the Reagan era, from Bon Jovi’s “Wanted Dead or Alive” to Night Ranger’s “Sister Christian,” the production arrives on Broadway with a lot of baggage, but also a charmed history. The show has already made it farther than anyone — including its creators — expected. And if “Rock of Ages” goes further still, it will be because of the artists whose relentlessly infectious songs would seem to be the biggest strike against it.

“My one luxury,” said its book writer, Chris D’Arienzo, “is that nobody has a real preciousness about Warrant or Styx.”

Like the people in his script Mr. D’Arienzo, 36, was one more transplant to Los Angeles who went to that city in search of stardom — in his case, from the small farming town of Paw Paw, Mich., where his first car was a diesel truck, and his neighbors included Jerry Mitchell, the future Tony Award-winning choreographer.

Growing up in the 1980s Mr. D’Arienzo was more a fan of punk rock and New Romantic bands than hair metal acts. “I actually tried to avoid that stuff,” he said, “because it was the music of the people that wanted to throw me into a locker.” But, as in most show business tales, Hollywood got him to change his mind.

In 2004 Mr. D’Arienzo was recruited by the producers Matthew Weaver and Carl Levin, who had successfully sold Universal Pictures an idea for a rock musical set in the 1980s, only to see the concept languish in development.

On a fateful drive Mr. Weaver and Mr. Levin happened to hear the 1981 power ballad “Don’t Stop Believing” by the band Journey and concluded that it would be just as potent on a stage as on their car radio. They rapidly put together a CD of like-minded rock songs and passed it to the director Kristin Hanggi to see if there was a show in there somewhere.

Ms. Hanggi, who was finishing the Off Broadway run of the pop musical “Bare,” agreed that there was. “The songs were organically telling their own stories, about culturally what rock ’n’ roll means to us and having permission to break free,” she said. “We knew that it would be self-aware, winking at the audience and including the audience inside the joke.”

Mr. D'Arienzo was persuaded too. "When I really looked back on the most important, nostalgic parts of my adolescence, they were defined by these songs that happened to be playing at the dance or in the car."

In meetings at various Sunset Strip institutions, from rock clubs to coffee bars, Ms. Hanggi and Mr. D'Arienzo sketched out the show, about an ensemble of characters at a fictitious West Hollywood club called the Bourbon Room. There would be an aspiring rock guitarist and an aspiring actress who fall in love, a seduction scene set to Foreigner's "I Want to Know What Love Is" and a dance number to the tune of REO Speedwagon's "Can't Fight This Feeling," inspired by the dream ballet in "Oklahoma!"

("We're rock music nerds," Ms. Hanggi said. "But do I know every word of 'Company'? Yes.")

In 2005 a nascent version of "Rock of Ages" was performed at King King, a club on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, followed in 2006 by runs at Vanguard, a nearby club, and on a soundstage at Ren-Mar Studios in Hollywood. Its cast members variously included Laura Bell Bundy (of Broadway's "Hairspray" and "Legally Blonde"), James Snyder (Broadway's "Cry-Baby") and the pop singer Katharine McPhee.

Reviews were occasionally brutal — Backstage called it "possibly the worst theatrical production in the last several years" — but receipts were promising enough that in May 2006 its producers transferred it to Las Vegas for a weeklong run at the Flamingo.

That proved to be a mistake: "It was like performing for the cast of 'Cocoon,'" Mr. Weaver said. Undeterred, the show moved to New York, where, with a cast anchored by the "American Idol" contestant Constantine Maroulis, it played Off Broadway from October through early January at New World Stages.

As usual, reviews varied. But the 499-seat theater was often sold out, attracting what producers said were ticket buyers seeking a boisterous concert experience rather than a genteel evening at the theater.

When movie rights were sold in December to New Line Cinema (the studio that produced the film adaptation of the "Hairspray" musical), a Broadway transfer for "Rock of Ages" became inevitable. Even in a barren economic environment the producers said they have encountered little difficulty capitalizing their Broadway production, whose initial budget they placed at \$7 million.

This fund-raising success, they said, was due partly to the show's subject matter, which attracted nontraditional investors. But they also acknowledged that their inexperience on Broadway made them oblivious to warning signs that might have discouraged more seasoned producers.

“We literally have horse blinders on,” said Scott Prisand, who is Mr. Weaver’s partner in the production company Corner Store Entertainment. “In our little world everything is awesome.”

As opening night approaches for the Broadway transfer, which stars Mr. Maroulis, Amy Spanger (“Kiss Me, Kate”) and James Carpinello (Broadway’s “Saturday Night Fever”), the producers have done all they can to play up its populist appeal: they have capped ticket prices at \$99 and hired servers to provide drinks during the show.

Still, the creators understand that it will take much more than \$10 cocktails to win over those theatergoers who are ready to consign the show to the dustbin of jukebox musical history, alongside “All Shook Up,” “Good Vibrations” and many others.

“I totally walk around town with my tail between my legs,” Mr. D’Arienzo said. “I totally get that people would, at first, find this to be a repellant notion. But that’s what I loved about the show.”

On the one hand, he acknowledged, a show whose first act concludes with its entire cast singing Whitesnake’s “Here I Go Again” would seem to have different ambitions from, say, “West Side Story.”

Then again, he said: “If I write something so ridiculous, maybe they’ll never make another jukebox musical again. Maybe that’s good too.”

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## **28. “Big-Hair Rockers Return in a New Arena: Broadway”**

Charles Isherwood, *The New York Times*

*April 7, 2009*

When it comes to hair — long beautiful hair or gleaming streaming hair or flaxen waxen hair — I am afraid that sweet nostalgia trip about flower children and free love has already become an also-ran on Broadway.

You want hair? Big hair? Hair you wouldn’t want to meet in a dark alley?

The champ is unquestionably “Rock of Ages,” a seriously silly, absurdly enjoyable arena-rock musical that thrashed open at the Brooks Atkinson Theater on Tuesday night in front of a bobbing sea of cigarette lighters waved aloft. The frothing piles of pleated, teased, bleached, dyed and fried tresses being tossed around in this new show about the good old days — in this case the 1980s on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles — make “Hair” look tame indeed, virtually Rogaine-ready, the Yul Brynner of musicals.

Fortunately, and I must say surprisingly, the attractions of this latest in the ceaseless parade of jukebox musicals on Broadway extend well beyond the extensions. Written with winky wit by Chris D’Arienzo, directed with zest by Kristin Hanggi, sung with scorching heat by a spirited cast, and featuring a towering stack of heavy-rotation favorites from the glory years of MTV — hits from Journey and Bon Jovi, Pat Benatar and Poison, Whitesnake and Twisted Sister — this karaoke comedy about

warped-vinyl dreams is about as guilty as pleasures get. Call it “Xanadu” for straight people — and straight-friendly people too.

The volcanic locks and endless guitar solos are tethered to a thin plot concocted from showbiz clichés spruced up in skin-hugging leather and acid-washed denim. But so what if the story is stale as the air in a dive bar at 6 a.m.? Mr. D’Arienzo, Ms. Hanggi and their ace designers (costumes by Gregory Gale, hair and wigs by Tom Watson and sets by Beowulf Boritt) mockingly evoke the sights, sounds and smells of the era with an affection so pure and an aesthetic so archly on-target that the familiar is freshened by a festive parade of gumdrop-colored lingerie and pungent grunge. When somebody pulls out a four-pack of Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers, the audience roars as if at a punch line of supreme perceptiveness.

Drew (Constantine Maroulis) is a shy kid from Michigan who sweeps the floors at the Bourbon Room, a legendary club on the Strip, while he waits for his dream of guitar-god stardom to materialize. Rocking his world one day is Sherrie (Amy Spanger), an aspiring actress from small-town Kansas also hoping to make it big in Hollywood. When her classic Farrah Fawcett meets his mid-period Steven Tyler, it’s love at first stroke of the brush.

Dating at least back to “Babes in Arms” is the subsidiary plot about a greedy German real estate developer (Paul Schoeffler) and his effete son (Wesley Taylor) who want to raze the Bourbon Room — and the rest of the Strip — to rebuild it along more profitable lines. Under threat of eviction, the club’s proprietor, Dennis (Adam Dannheisser), an old pothead and rock dog, hatches a plan to rescue the club by hosting the farewell concert from the mega-band Arsenal, which got its start there. On the momentous night Drew gets his big break as the opening act but also has his heart nearly broken when Stacey Jaxx (James Carpinello), the bleach-brained singer of Arsenal, puts the moves on the sequin-struck Sherrie.

Dressing up these story lines like studs on a belt are more than two dozen radio-rock hits from the era. Audiences to whom this music is utterly foreign will no doubt view “Rock of Ages” as they might an unusually raucous couple of hours in the monkey cage at the zoo. You don’t have to truly like the music to succumb to the tug of remembrance it inspires, but you have to recognize it. If Proust had never tasted that first madeleine, the last wouldn’t have had quite the same impact.

I was an adolescent pop snob in the ’80s, turning up my nose at the vulgarity of straight-up guitar-driven rock to seek out adventurers on the fringe, which is to say anything British involving big, bad hair of a different sort. But while waiting impatiently for MTV to vouchsafe a morsel of Siouxsie or the Smiths, I absorbed an awful lot of thrashy pop.

“Rock of Ages” made me realize with humility how time can play appalling tricks on taste; songs that used to make my skin crawl and my lip curl, having now acquired the patina of age, brought forth a stream of affectionate recollection. “Don’t Stop Believing” and “Waiting for a Girl Like You” and “We Built This City” are not the musical equivalents of classic Bordeaux vintages, but I never would have guessed that wine coolers could age this well.



The performances blend sincere conviction and knowing parody. Mr. Maroulis, an alum of “American Idol,” possesses a soulful, pure and intense voice that negotiates the mountains of melisma and cuts through the electricity with ease. He isn’t required to do anything intense in the acting department, but has a natural, laid-back presence that invites you to root for Drew. Ms. Spanger, a veteran of several Broadway shows, sings with a matching ferocity, and plays the hard-used heroine with a smidgen of real winsomeness.

The supporting players are just as terrific. Mr. Carpinello, got up in a sequined zebra-stripe tank top and white leather suggestive of Cher at her least demure, plays the drug-dazed egomaniac Stacee with commanding sexual charisma, blasting his big solo, Bon Jovi’s “Wanted Dead or Alive” (a song I furtively loved even back in the day), to the back wall of the theater. Mr. Taylor, in rosy-cheeked Pee Wee makeup and goofball German accent, shares a preposterously funny duet with Lauren Molina, as an earth-girl activist, on Ms. Benatar’s “Hit Me With Your Best Shot.” Just as amusing is the unexpected duet performed by Mr. Dannheisser and Mitchell Jarvis, who plays Dennis’s right-hand man at the club, on REO Speedwagon’s “Can’t Fight This Feeling” a dreadful song, yes, but repurposed to sweetly subversive effect here.

Mr. Jarvis’s hilarious, pop-eyed performance as the evening’s narrator is among the show’s zaniest and most original delights. Sporting a spiked mullet and a series of tacky T-shirts, he zips around the stage merrily, adding comic commentary or plugging a hole in the plot. It’s as if a perky, wise-cracking woodland animal from a Disney cartoon had leaped off the screen, become human and acquired a taste for both illicit drugs and ballet.

“Rock of Ages” does not possess the deadpan brilliance of the classic mock-doc “This Is Spinal Tap” (what does?), and two-plus hours may seem a long time to spend inside a David Lee Roth video. But in These Straitened Economic Times the allure of nostalgia cannot be underestimated. “Rock of Ages” does not aspire to be a Broadway musical for the ages, but for anyone whose youth coincided with the time period in question, the siren call of those screaming guitars and singalong choruses may be impossible to resist.

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## **29. “Review: Rock of Ages”**

David Rooney, *Variety*

*April 7, 2009*

If the 1980s were a bad-fashion blur you’d rather forget, “Rock of Ages” may not be for you. But if tortured mullets, unwaxed chests, studded leather, acid-wash denim and wailing guitars make you yearn for the Reagan years, this unapologetically silly hair-metal jukebox musical will probably have you gulping tequila shots and singing along. Every bit as brazen as the yardstick for the genre, “Mamma Mia!” in wedging hit songs into a purpose-built, featherweight plot, the show has an abiding affection for its inglorious era that goes some way toward selling its brash charms.

With their grandiose mini-narratives about small-town girls and city boys following their dreams and finding love, or at least rock ‘n’ roll heaven, amid the heartache, the

overproduced songs of bands like Styx, Poison, Foreigner, Europe, Asia and Survivor are a surprisingly snug fit for musical treatment.

That music may not feature heavily in the iTunes libraries of Broadway show fans, but given the eternal push to find new theater audiences, maybe it's not a bad idea to bypass the regulars once in a while and speak directly to the bridge and tunnel crowd. A New Line movie currently in the works can't hurt the branding profile of "Rock of Ages," either.

Even before curtain, the atmosphere at the Brooks Atkinson is less like Broadway than a concert experience. The air is thick with fog and a whiff of armpit that could be an olfactory effect or a hard-working drinks waiter — the show has in-seat cocktail service, something you don't get at "Irena's Vow." The merchandise stands are doing brisk sales in "Hooray for Boobies" T-shirts, while seemingly heterosexual bartenders shout, "Splash of cran, ladies?" Toto, I've a feeling we're not in the theater district any more.

As the show opens with blinding lights, ear-shredding guitars and hammer-handed drumming, it's clear that mosh-pit atmosphere is paramount. Beowulf Boritt's witty set is a jumble of iconic signage — the Chateau Marmont, an Angelyne billboard, Jack Daniels ads — that re-creates Los Angeles' Sunset Strip in the '80s. That setting frames Dupree's Bourbon Room, a fictional venue festooned with bras and panties of groupies past. But behind the show's trashy facade lies a conventionally sweet musical that traces the standard trajectory of boy meets, loses and finally wins girl.

Narrator, or self-described "dramatic conjurer," is sound guy Lonny (Mitchell Jarvis), an ingratiating Jack Black clone who winks at the audience with every hoary contrivance. His star-crossed lovers are busboy and wannabe rocker Drew ("American Idol" alum Constantine Maroulis) and aspiring actress Sherrie Christian (Amy Spanger), a Kansas gal whose name dictates we'll be hearing both Steve Perry's "Oh Sherrie" and Night Ranger's "Sister Christian" before long.

While Sherrie is misreading Drew's signals and getting sidetracked by debauched metal star Stacey Jaxx (James Carpinello), a German developer (Paul Schoeffler) strikes a deal to replace the Strip with a strip mall, sparking a protest to save the club. There's also Sherrie's downward spiral as, embittered and confused, she takes a lap-dancing gig under the wing of Venus Club den mother Justice (Michele Mais).

Chris D'Arienzo's broad-strokes story never pretends to cut deeper than the musicvideo narratives it echoes, so despite appealing work from both Maroulis and Spanger, the show's emotional surges are linked more to the songs than to the romance. When an audience is primed to laugh just by the opening bars of a cheesy '80s anthem, the writing doesn't exactly need to be timeless, nor the comedy particularly clever.

Arranger-orchestrator Ethan Popp does a nifty job overlapping thematically related songs to further the flimsy plot, notably the scene-setter of Quiet Riot's "Cum on Feel the Noize" with David Lee Roth's "Just Like Paradise," or Quarterflash's "Harden My Heart" with Pat Benatar's "Shadows of the Night" during Sherrie's stripper odyssey.

There's some wit in the appropriation of Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" as a protest number; Bon Jovi's self-mythologizing cowboy tune "Wanted Dead or Alive" as a sleazy peacock strut for Stacey; and Poison's "Every Rose Has Its Thorn," deftly manipulated into a multivoiced 11 o'clock number.

But the biggest crowd-pleasers are the character-driven songs. REO Speedwagon's "Can't Fight This Feeling" serves as a bromance declaration between Lonny and Bourbon boss Dennis (Adam Dannheisser), while Benatar's "Hit Me With Your Best Shot" becomes a rebel yell from effete Franz (Wesley Taylor), the German developer's no-longer-acquiescent son. Those numbers are boosted by performers given humorous characterizations rather than cutouts to play. However, in the show's juiciest comic role, Carpinello brings the bod and the vocal chops but doesn't match the bad-boy magnetism of Will Swenson, whose Stacey was the highlight of the Off Broadway run.

Director Kristin Hanggi knows better than to loiter long between songs, and while it's overstretched for a show that waves its lack of substance like a banner, "Rock of Ages" keeps moving. Choreographer Kelly Devine gleefully apes the worst excesses of the era's pole-dancing, crotch-grinding, big-hair-tossing moves; costumer Gregory Gale re-creates the wardrobe crimes with flair; hair guru Tom Watson has worked overtime with the curling wand; and Jason Lyons' aggressive lighting cranks up the heat.

While "The Wedding Singer" failed to sustain a Broadway audience with its '80s campfest, that show didn't have around 30 of the decade's quintessential hits sampled by a cast that screeches, roars and purrs as if to the power chord born. It's safe to say nostalgists won't feel cheated by "Rock of Ages," and that it won't be stealing audiences from "South Pacific." But by the time the ensemble unites on Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'," even nonbelievers may start inhaling the Aqua Net and embracing their inner rocker.

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### **30. "Girls, Girls, Girls"**

Stephanie Zacharek, New York Mag

*April 8, 2009*

Neil LaBute's *Reasons to Be Pretty*, the final play in a trilogy that also includes *The Shape of Things* and *Fat Pig*, ostensibly mines some rich, complex subjects: the delicate nature of women's feelings about their own looks; men's capacity for deceit and selfish cruelty, or just plain cluelessness; and the inability of men and women to bridge the gap that eternally divides them. But for LaBute, subjects take precedence over people, and they circle this play (which had a successful Off Broadway run last year) like hungry lions in search of characters to eat. What's left, in the end, are a pile of bones and a few indigestible scraps of something that sounds an awful lot like a master's thesis. Its title might be "Male-Female Relationships: The Dark Side."

*Reasons to Be Pretty* opens with a screaming match: Steph (Marin Ireland) has heard from her best friend, Carly (Piper Perabo), that her boyfriend, Greg (Thomas Sadoski), has been making disparaging comments about her looks, comparing her to a

pretty female co-worker. She rails at him with the fury of a pissed-off Greek goddess; he, trapped in the body of a mere mortal schmo, proffers a few limp rejoinders and then gives up. Steph walks out, permanently, and the two other people in Greg's little social circle—Carly and her husband, Kent (Steven Pasquale), both of whom are also Greg's co-workers—pretend not to take sides, even as they make Greg feel worse about his predicament. It doesn't help that Kent swaggers around the break room at work, flexing his considerable muscles and spouting misogynist rhetoric, much to Greg's dismay and horror.

LaBute wants us to face, with bitter laughter, the uglier aspects of human nature. But he doesn't love his characters, beyond the fact that they serve his purpose. It's no wonder the performers here—directed by Terry Kinney—have trouble fleshing out those characters. They're not acting, they're delivering material; and they have no chance of outrunning the lion.

Heavy metal is so intrinsically theatrical that it makes sense to build a musical comedy around it. But can you parody a form that's already a parody of itself? *Rock of Ages* is a mangled singing, dancing extravaganza set to the hair metal of Whitesnake, Journey, and Bon Jovi, among others. (Def Leppard, proving their members are gentlemen of taste, wouldn't grant the rights to their music.) An aspiring rock star and an actress hopeful (played by Constantine Maroulis, of *American Idol* fame, and Amy Spanger) pursue their dreams, and love, in late-eighties Los Angeles. By night, they work in a Sunset Strip rock club that an uptight European developer (Paul Schoeffler) hopes to demolish and replace. There's also an emcee (Mitchell Jarvis), who narrates the action like a Greek chorus made up of one desperate Jack Black imitator.

*Rock of Ages*, which was written by Chris D'Arienzo and directed by Kristin Hanggi, and which played Off Broadway last year, is too full of self-conscious winks, nudges, and wine-cooler jokes to be much fun. There's energy onstage, all right, but it's unfocused and muddled. The dancers—the show's choreography is by Kelly Devine—wriggle about in epaulette-shouldered leather jackets and neon animal-print Spandex, trying to conjure the big-haired ghosts of a lost era. They only end up looking cheap and desperate. This is no way to get your rocks off.

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### 31. “*Rock of Ages*, Shaftesbury Theatre, review”

Charles Spencer, *The Telegraph*  
*September 28, 2011*

This is as unpleasant a pile of theatrical poo as it has ever been my misfortune to tread in. Yet another in the apparently endless parade of mindless jukebox musicals, *Rock of Ages* is set in the Los Angeles of the Eighties. Its aim is to celebrate the glam metal bands of the period, a genre sometimes known as “poodle rock” because of the absurd blow-dried hairstyles of many of its leading practitioners. It was always a particularly naff form of popular music, much given to both maudlin power ballads and brain-dead rock-outs with lots of shrieking guitars. Poison, Whitesnake, Foreigner, Starship, Bon Jovi, Twisted Sister and Mötley Crüe (redundant umlauts were a big feature of the period) are among the more famous exponents of the genre, though they all seem to blur into one with their high-tech productions and soulless emoting.

The big surprise is that this dire show, with its fatuous storyline about a hopeful young actress and a wannabe rock star suffering no end of romantic and professional agonies on LA's sunset Strip, has received a warm welcome in some quarters. It has been running for a couple of years on Broadway, where it was described as a guilty pleasure by the New York Times, touring versions are rolling out across the world, and a film version is threatened for next year starring Tom Cruise, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Russell Brand.

The show's book by Chris D'Arienzo is inanely predictable, lamentably written and surprisingly sordid, with its tale of how sweet innocent Sherrie is seduced and promptly dumped by a rock god called Stacey Jaxx in the gents' lavatory of a rock bar called the Bourbon Room. In her despair she winds up as a self-loathing stripper. There is also a horribly louche narrator, like a descendant of Thersites in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, who constantly sticks his tongue out at the audience in a lewd manner as he celebrates sex and drugs and rock'n'roll.

The jokes are unfunny, the story both predictable and appallingly written, while the acting – with the club's proprietor played by low-grade TV presenter Justin Lee Collins with X-Factor veteran Shayne Ward as the rock god – is dismal.

I usually have a soft spot for cheesy sleaze, but there is something repellent about this show's leering manner, while the subplot involving a crude caricatured German property developer, who wants to demolish Sunset Strip, and his outrageously camp son proves as infantile as it is unfunny.

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### **32. "Rock of Ages – review"**

Michael Hann, *The Guardian*

*September 28, 2011*

Those who have read *The Dirt*, the extraordinary memoirs of the hair metal band Mötley Crüe, will have fixed in their mind a vivid picture of life on LA's Sunset Strip in the Reagan years: one in which unpleasant young rock musicians indulge in hard drugs and exploitative sex, and become even more unpleasant in the process.

Those who have read *The Dirt* may be surprised to find its backdrop the setting for this imported American musical, in which two youngsters search for stardom in LA, distracted along the way by assorted sleazoids – including the distinctly charisma-less former X Factor winner Shayne Ward, and a fractionally more appealing Justin Lee Collins – who help them sing their way through one of those 80s rock compilations that get advertised on TV in the runup to Father's Day.

It's a very peculiar show indeed, with an unvarying and unpleasant tone of careless sexualisation. Rock'n'roll debauchery is presented as the pure and innocent way of dreamers: when a ruthless German developer announces his plans to tear down the Strip – prompting the inevitable refrain of Starship's *We Built This City* – protesters carry placards reading "Strip Clubs not Strip Malls!"

Aside from the female lead, Sherrie (Amy Pemberton), women exist only to parade in underwear, as hookers, strippers or waitresses, and Sherrie has to take on two of those jobs. The furthest it strays from stereotype is to reveal the developer's camp son Fritz as straight – "I'm not gay! I'm German!" – and to use REO Speedwagon's I Can't Fight This Feeling to celebrate two men discovering their love for each other, though it is a shame that scene is played for comedy rather than tenderness.

The book, by Chris D'Arienzo, is as shallow as the scene it supposedly sends up. Worse, it is almost entirely free of laughs, reliant on frequent recourse to the use of props such as prosthetic penises, and Lonny, the narrator (Simon Lipkin) wearing a T-shirt bearing the legend "Hooray for boobies". When he bemoans being "lured to narrate a show with poop jokes and Whitesnake songs", one feels like commiserating.

That wouldn't matter if the songs were up to snuff, but these jukebox musicals stand or fall on the audience's love for the music, hence the continuing success of *We Will Rock You* and *Mamma Mia!* In Britain, *Rock of Ages* might struggle with its score. The back catalogues of Styx, Quarterflash, Night Ranger and Pat Benatar – all mined here – don't resonate in the UK the way they might in Peoria. It climaxes, inevitably, with *Don't Stop Believin'* and one thinks: Stop? I never started.

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### **33. "Rock of Ages, Shaftesbury Theatre, London"**

Pierre Perrone, *The Independent*

*September 27, 2011*

On paper, a juke-box musical based on the power ballads of Foreigner, Journey and REO Speedwagon and the hair metal anthems of Bon Jovi, Poison and Twisted Sister sounds an even worse idea than *We Will Rock You*. Until you look at the download sales of Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" and work backwards, like Chris D'Arienzo must have done when he wrote the book for *Rock of Ages*.

More a mixtape than a juke-box musical, it manages to both glory in and lampoon the clichés of the rock genres it's built on, with knowing nods to Axl Rose and David Lee Roth, and the odd X-rated joke about groupies and ping-pong balls, and wipes the floor with the Queen vehicle.

The storyline D'Arienzo has weaved around the 30 timewarp rock tracks is enjoyable in its very predictability. A ditzy blonde from the Midwest – named Sherrie after Journey vocalist Steve Perry's biggest solo hit, and zestily played by Amy Pemberton – walks into the Bourbon Room, a Whisky a Go Go-style venue on LA's Sunset Strip, and is hired by its owner Dennis Dupree. An irritant on television and on the radio, Justin Lee Collins is more personable and in his element as Dupree. Drew, an aspiring musician hoping to become the new "Sebastian Bach" – cue Skid Row gag for the hair metal trainspotters – falls for Sherrie but loses her to rock star Stacey Jaxx whose party animal persona doesn't prove too much of a stretch for the 2005 *X Factor* winner Shayne Ward. There is a subplot about the redevelopment of the Sunset Strip – yes, the cast belt out Starship's "We Built This City" with gusto – and Sherrie winds up in a gentlemen's club run by Rachel McFarlane, who steals the show with her soulful voice. Best is the mullet-sporting Simon Lipkin as Lonny, Dupree's bartending sidekick, who constantly breaks the fourth wall.

The way D'Arienzo intertwines the hits as characters interact – most effectively when Sherrie sings Joan Jett's "I Hate Myself For Loving You" and Drew and Stacey reply with Asia's "Heat of the Moment" during a rollicking second act – proves infectious. The pseudo-rebellious stance of *Rock of Ages* doesn't bear much scrutiny, but as a feelgood, singalong, rock'n'roll musical it's hard to fault. The most fun I've had at a musical since *Jersey Boys*.

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### **34. "Sydney pulls the plug on *Rock of Ages*"**

Matt Trueman, *The Guardian*

*October 27, 2011*

*Rock of Ages* has cancelled its proposed Sydney premiere following poor ticket sales. The news comes in the buildup to the jukebox musical's Japanese premiere, which will take place next week in Tokyo.

The Australian production, which has been playing at the Comedy theatre in Melbourne since April, had been scheduled to start previews at the Theatre Royal in Sydney from 11 January 2012. However, it was announced yesterday that the show's Sydney run would be postponed indefinitely.

Rodney Rigby of production company Newtheatricals said: "It has been decided due to the current economic environment, *Rock of Ages* will reschedule its Sydney season at a later time."

As it stands, the Australian production will have its final performance in Brisbane on 18 December. The current Melbourne run ends on 6 November.

According to the Aussie theatre website, there has been speculation that Sydney's theatre market is not capable of supporting three musicals simultaneously. The city is already due to host productions of *Love Never Dies* and *Annie* from January.

Meanwhile, a Japanese-language production is set to open on 28 October at the Toyko International Forum, before touring to Osaka and Fukuoka, according to *Playbill.com*. Popular Japanese singer Nishikawa Takanori (also known as TM Revolution) will lead the cast.

*Rock of Ages* follows busboy Drew Foley in his attempts to forge a career as a rock star. Songs featured in the musical include Journey's *Don't Stop Believing* and Foreigner's *I Wanna Know What Love Is*.

Despite Broadway success, including five nominations at the Tony awards, the UK premiere of *Rock of Ages* was much derided by theatre critics, with the *Telegraph's* Charles Spencer calling it "as unpleasant a pile of theatrical poo as it has ever been my misfortune to tread in".

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### **35. "Curtain falls early on *Rock of Ages* musical"**

Nathanael Cooper, *The Courier Mail*

*November 24, 2011*

DESPITE rave reviews and audience acclaim the '80s rock musical Rock of Ages is closing its doors early.

The show had been expected to run until mid-December but the curtain will come down for the final time on December 4.

It is another blow for the cast, who were expecting the tour to continue to Sydney after Brisbane, but that season was "postponed" before the show had even closed in Melbourne.

With the most expensive tickets coming in at a hefty \$130, the show was up against Disney juggernaut Mary Poppins which starts previews at the end of December.

The show sold well in Melbourne but was in a much smaller theatre and struggled to find its audience in larger venues like QPAC.

To help lure audiences in, the producers will drop tickets to \$79 for all remaining seats from Saturday.

The cast includes several Queensland performers including Michael Falzon as Stacey Jaxx, Rachel Dunham as Justice and Francine Cain as activist Regina.

Rock of Ages was roundly applauded by critics after the November 13 opening but it hasn't been enough to encourage audiences to see the show.

The show marked principal role debuts for many of the cast including End of Fashion's Justin Burford who made his first foray into music theatre in Rock of Ages, Amy Lephamer as Sherrie, Brent Hill as Lonnie and Lincoln Hall as Franz.

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### **36. "Tom Cruise se desata"**

Javier Ocaña, El País

*9 de agosto de 2012*

Escena inicial: una chica deja su pueblo y viaja en autobús a Los Ángeles en busca de la gloria como cantante; durante el trayecto, abre una caja que agarra como un tesoro y allí están, sus preciados discos de vinilo; de pronto, comienza a cantar para expresar sus sentimientos, a la manera del musical clásico, y la siguen los demás pasajeros, como un coro griego. Es una buena secuencia de arranque, un homenaje a otra época, en la que el soporte físico de la música aún era motivo de delectación, en la que el musical era un género espectacular, vivo y efervescente. Y, sin embargo, conforme avanza la película, la dura realidad se va imponiendo: Rock of ages, adaptación cinematográfica del musical nacido precisamente en Los Ángeles, y representado, entre otros, en los teatros del neoyorquino Broadway y el West End londinense, es un producto genuinamente contemporáneo: indolente, insustancial, blanco, que va de gamberro pero que sólo es ligeramente travieso, quizá como los tiempos que corren.

Ambientado en la década de los ochenta, durante los años previos a la eclosión de los grupos de pop para quinceañeras, el musical presume de espíritu rock, pero, por mucho que se ría explícitamente de grupos como los Backstreet Boys frente a la



presunta dureza del glam metal, Rock of ages, pasado por una batidora de levedad y con una historia central lastimosamente parecida a Burlesque, el infecto musical de Christina Aguilera y Cher de hace un par de años, está mucho más cerca de High school musical que, por poner un ejemplo, del alma contestataria de Hair. Lanzas la piedra, como en el baile en la iglesia de las madres pijas ultracatólicas, para luego esconder la mano: es más una broma que una provocación.

La sorprendente presencia de Tom Cruise como estrella decadente, borracha y mujeriega (y además cantando con gran fuerza), sin duda lo mejor de la película, solo sirve para demostrar una vez más (¿recuerdan Tropic Thunder?) que, frente a sus detractores, Cruise es muy capaz de reírse de sí mismo, pero la sobredosis de baladas (ya sabemos que era algo consustancial a grupos como Bon Jovi o Europe, pero, ¿más de la mitad de las canciones?), la convencional puesta en escena de Adam Shankman y el nulo carisma de la joven pareja protagonista, que además debe bregar con una trama entre insulsa e idiota, provocan que, un año más, la resurrección del musical aún esté por llegar.

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